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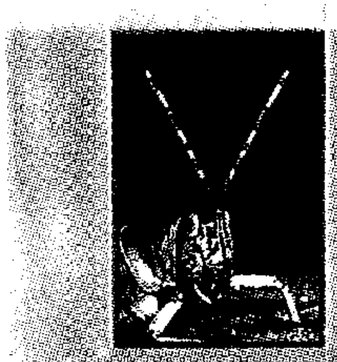
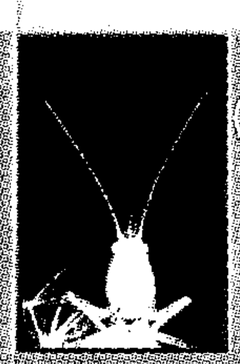


GRASSHOPPER
Conocephalus sp.
Costa Rica



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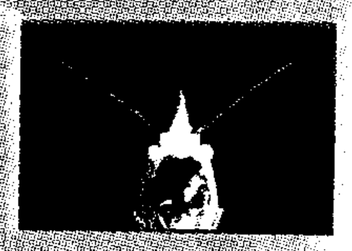
CLOSE UP OF HEAD
COSTA RICA



RUBYTAIL OR CUCKOO WASP
Chrysis ignita

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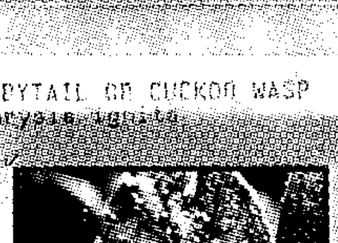
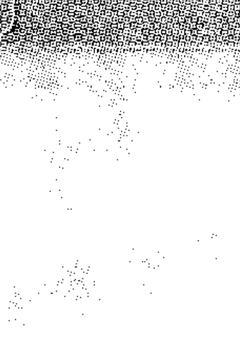
LESTE RABBIT'S GRASSHOPPER
Romalea sp.
VERADE FINAL MOULTING STAGE
KARAOO NP SOUTH AFRICA

GREEN MANTIS
COSTA RICA

ASSASSIN BUG
Rhynocoris iracundus
AFRICA





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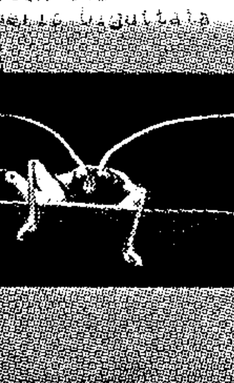

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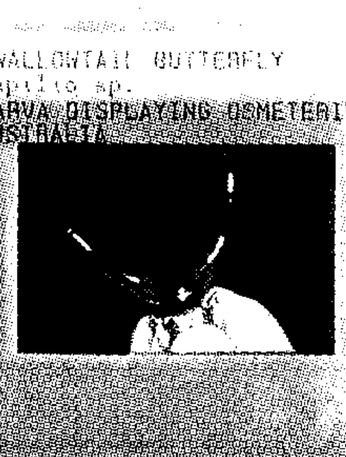
IMAGO HEAD STUDY
CHURCH WARSLEY DERBYS

SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY
Papilio sp.
LARVA DISPLAYING OSMETERIUM
AUSTRALIA



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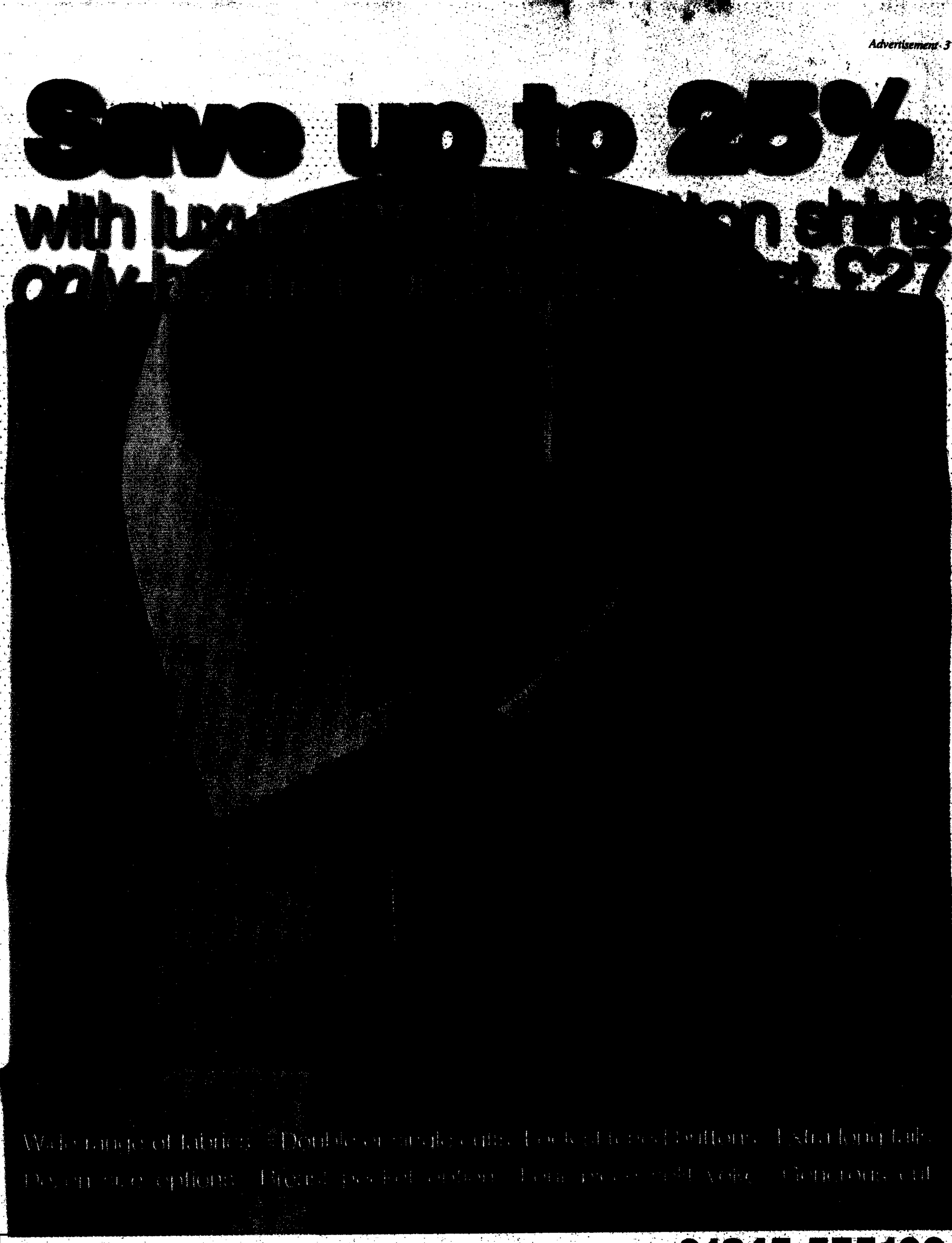

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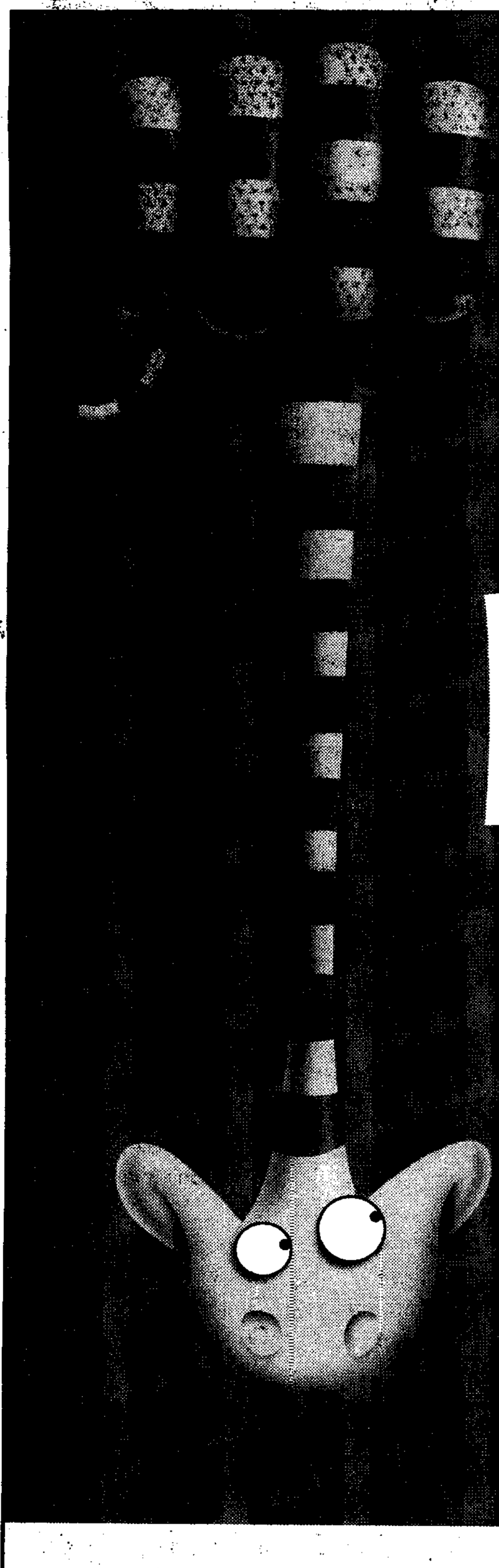

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■ **Jeremy** *from Truro is a 44 year old teacher. He loves the theatre, cinema and enjoys cooking and entertaining at home. He also enjoys travelling abroad and sightseeing. He is intellectual but also friendly and considerate.*

■ **Christine** *is a 42 year old Manager from Chester. An attractive non-smoker, she enjoys social drinking, dinner parties and the cinema. She describes herself as confident and friendly.*

■ **John** *is a 25 year old Pensions Administrator from Ashford. He is a non-smoker and occasional drinker who enjoys sport, motoring and mixing with friends. He considers himself to be patient, reliable and positive.*

■ **Paula** *is 20, averagely attractive and from London. She is a chef who enjoys listening to pop music, going to parties and clubs. She also enjoys watching television and keeping fit and is lively and fashionable.*

■ **David** *is a 35 year old Chartered Engineer from Leeds. In his spare time he enjoys a mixture of classical and pop/rock music as well as walking, DIY and keeping fit. He describes himself as sensitive and ambitious.*

*Names have been changed for reasons of privacy.

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Attractiveness:
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☐ Attractive
☐ Average

Your Personality

Tick which traits closely describe you

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☐ Serious ☐ Practical
☐ Considerate ☐ Conventional
☐ Shy ☐ Reliable
☐ Romantic ☐ Adventurous

Your Interests

Please tick for a liking,cross for a dislike or leave blank for no pref.

☐ Wining/Dining ☐ Jazz/Folk music
☐ Pubs ☐ Classical music
☐ Sports/Keep fit ☐ Theatre/Arts
☐ Politics/History ☐ Watching TV
☐ Reading ☐ Smoking
☐ Travelling ☐ Mixing with friends
☐ Science/Tech ☐ Children
☐ Cinema ☐ Homemaking
☐ Pets/Animals ☐ Gardening
☐ Pop music ☐ Countryside

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☐ I prefer town life
☐ I involve myself in community activities
☐ I have many friends of my own sex
☐ I am interested in current affairs
☐ I am looking for one special relationship
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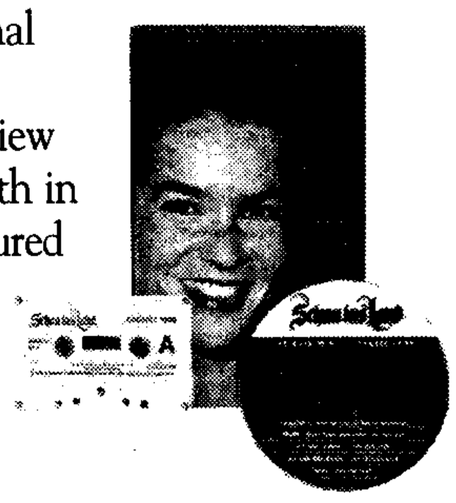
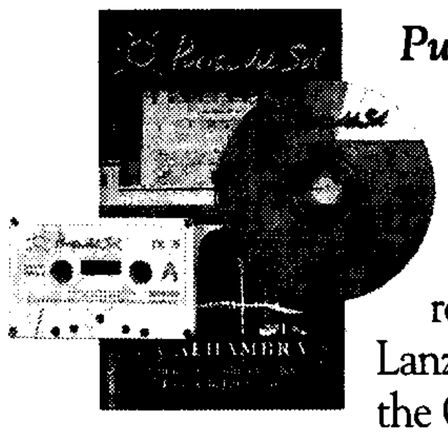


Schau ins Land in German: Professional journalists in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland provide a fascinating overview of German-speaking Europe every month in *Schau ins Land*. Recent issues have featured interviews with Nobel laureate Günter Grass and figure skater Katarina Witt, a visit to Goslar in the Harz Mountains, and a look at the newly renovated Reichstag in Berlin.



Puerta del Sol in Spanish: A talented group of broadcast journalists in Madrid examines the colourful textures of Hispanic culture every two months. Among the segments on recent editions are visits to the island of Lanzarote, the Alhambra in Granada, and the Grand Mosque in Córdoba. A commemoration of Argentine poet and writer Jorge Luis Borges on the 100th anniversary of his birth, a profile of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, and a feature on Galician folk instruments are other highlights of this exceptional audiomagazine.

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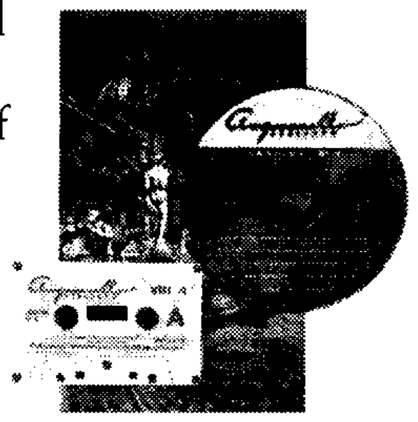

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I AM happy to announce that a settlement has been reached in the dispute between my newspapers and Mr Cashcroft, Treasurer of the Conservative Party and UN Ambassador of the Republic of Selize.

At an informal drinks party aboard my aeroplane, Mr Cashcroft and I both agreed that it is unhelpful for newspapers to go prying into the affairs of very rich businessmen who choose to live abroad for the purposes of avoiding tax and who use their money to wield political influence.

We have, therefore, agreed to draw a line under this unfortunate affair.

Meanwhile, my editor Mr Stopwork has my fullest confidence, as he seeks alternative employment in what is a very tough market.

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COLOUR SECTION

IT was only days ago that Michael Ashcroft, Britain's representative in Belize and treasurer of the British Conservative party, was writing in the *Independent* about his forthcoming libel victory over the *Times*, boasting privately to friends that he was going to "smash" Rupert Murdoch and "smash" *Times* editor Peter Stothard.

So jubilant was the Belize billionaire that he assured William Hague, leader of the Tory party, that he was certain to get summary judgment against the *Times* on 13 December, and the whole action would be won, gloriously, by Christmas.

So what happened? What reduced the confident treasurer to a snivelling heap, accepting in full settlement of the action, without the *Times* contributing a penny towards Ashcroft's already mammoth costs, a bromide statement from the *Times* which did not apologise or retract a single word of its rather loosely-written attack on Ashcroft?

The short answer is that on Tuesday 30 November Ashcroft's lawyers (George Carman QC, James Price QC, etc) got first sight of the *Times*'s defence. Two days later, on 2 December, Ashcroft's humiliation, skilfully brokered over Christmas champagne at the St James's residence of *Times* proprietor Rupert Murdoch, was complete.

What was the gist of this defence, much of which was put together by specially-hired Canadian investigators and prepared by well-known Tory-baiter Geoffrey Robertson QC, that struck such terror into the Tory party treasurer and the entire Tory establishment?

The NADDIS (Narcotics And Dangerous Drugs Information Service) and DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) files. Ashcroft is referred to twice in the files of NADDIS, the comprehensive official US list of anyone whose name has ever been connected to trafficking in dangerous drugs. His name also appears in three DEA money-laundering investigations, including a ten-page document devoted entirely to a profile of Michael Ashcroft, the man. Anyone with two or more "hits" on the NADDIS lists can be stopped and searched at random by federal police. As the *Times* statement made clear, none of these "hits" are evidence of drug-running or money-laundering; but anyone has the right to challenge the use of their name on these lists in the US courts, and the *Times* defence planned to ask Mr Ashcroft if he has any plans to do so.

The defence also intended to ask Ashcroft about his role in a 1988 operation involving the carriage of money in small planes via Iceland, and what exactly he had to do with the Ricke case in which his Belize bank accepted $25,000 across the counter in a manner contrary to the law against money-laundering. Then there is the strange story of the small plane in which Ashcroft was spotted in Savannah. Ashcroft apparently does not recall this trip, but the libel court would almost certainly have heard from the pilot who said he knew Ashcroft well and had flown with him many times. The plane is owned by Minter (another NADDIS hit), a corporation owned by another NADDIS hit, Victore Belote, an enterprising exporter of mahogany artefacts from a private airport in Belize.

Perhaps the most embarrassing moment for Ashcroft in the trial would have been the reading of a long affidavit from the Council of Europe's leading expert on money laundering. The expert found no direct evidence to implicate Ashcroft in such activity but concluded with the surprising sentence: "Taken as a whole, the DEA documents tend to suggest that there are a number of coincidences in different areas of Mr Ashcroft's business which would be unlucky if found in an innocent businessman."

Two other matters were dealt with by the *Times* defence. The first was the way in which Ashcroft, with the help of the Belize political party he pays for and top London lawyers Allen & Overy, has turned Belize into the world's greatest paradise for tax avoiders. The trust act 1992, expertly drafted by Allen & Overy's finest, makes Belize a haven for offshore trusts, not least the one financed by the Bank of Belize, which is owned by Michael Ashcroft.

Finally, the defence dwells at uncomfortable length on the influence Ashcroft wields in Britain through his close connections with the Tory party. His role in state education in the Tory borough of Wandsworth, including the installation of his burglar-alarm systems in so many Wandsworth schools and his employment of at least two Wandsworth council bigwigs, is afforded special prominence.

Nor is "new" Labour entirely free of criticism in this section. Richard Painter is Ashcroft's man in Wandsworth and took four Tory MPs on a special visit to Belize in 1996. Despite his complete lack of any qualifications as an education administrator, Painter was picked to lead the Tory government's hit team against Hackney Downs, a "failing" school in one of London's poorest areas. So shocked was Labour by such an open display of prejudice in favour of a leading Tory company that it put Mr Painter in charge of its "improvement team" for all Hackney schools.

The very thought of endless days of public cross-examination on all these matters by Geoffrey Robertson and his team was enough to send the Belize bullshitter and his agent, the editor of *Sunday Business*, Jeff Randall, scurrying to Ashcroft's old chums the Thatchers, who sent him on to Rupert Murdoch who in turn provided him with the sanctuary of a shabby compromise.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The next issue of PRIVATE EYE will be on sale from Wednesday 12th January and is out fortnightly thereafter.

● The cover price goes up to £1.20 – the first increase in over 5 years.

● *A sleazy Christmas with Max Clifford* 12
● *Piloti at the Greenwich dome* 17
● *Yule log-rolling: Literary Review* 40, 41

BREAKFAST IN BED WITH NORRIS

"This is what deregulation does, son..."

IF Steve Norris is allowed to stand for mayor of London, attention may revert from his womanising to his policies – not least his attitude to public transport in the capital.

Norris, who has firmly stated his commitment to privatisation, declares on his mayoral web-site: "If London doesn't have a decent tube and bus system, then 7 million people will continue to be let down – day in, day out and week in, week out."

This is something of a turnaround for the former Tory transport minister who in 1995 demonstrated a clear preference for the car above public transport before the Commons environment select committee. "They are the only door-to-door system you have. You have your own company, your own temperature control, your own music – and don't have to put up with dreadful human beings sitting alongside you."

Sadly for Steve, not even privatisation can solve the problem of fellow passengers.

FACT: Norris was appointed director-general of the Road Haulage Association in 1997.

● *More on the London mayoral race 16*

SAY what you like about Jeffrey Archer, he is eerily prescient. His play *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, written in 1987 (long before the Anglia TV affair), has a most interesting sub-plot about share dealings.

The hero, Sir David Metcalfe QC, takes a call from his stockbroker. "Did you get the shares?" he asks. "Good. The bid will be announced on Thursday. My source is impeccable. Naturally, I shall want you to sell within the account. That gives you a clear ten days. I have never let you down in the past, have I? The sum is larger this time because the source is even more reliable. I don't see how anyone could describe me as an insider."

Equally striking are the names of the *dramatis personae*. Metcalfe is named after Archer's old athletics chum Adrian Metcalfe, and there is also a Dr Weeden, which just happens to be the fragrant Lady Archer's maiden name. But what inspired the great storyteller to create the "pompous twit" of a barrister who is Metcalfe's most dangerous rival – one Anthony Blair-Booth QC?

MARY ARCHER is not only fragrant but brilliant, of course: the *Telegraph* noted recently that she is now a visiting professor in the biochemistry department of Imperial College, London.

This came as a surprise to some staff and students, who can find no mention of her in the college phonebook and have never seen her at any official Imperial events. Why the low profile?

A source close to the rector explains: "She tends not to be invited to college functions, in case she brings him along with her."

● *Foot on Archer 42*

THE makers of Krug champagne, mourning the cancellation of Lord Archer's Christmas parties, will be glad to learn that Gordon Brown has come to the rescue.

Passengers on a flight to Washington earlier this month were impressed to see that our eternally prudent chancellor, travelling first-class, not only polished off a bottle of Krug by himself but went on to request another bottle for his later use as he prepared to leave the plane.

FOLLOWING hard on the news that the Queen will have to force down Tesco non-vintage champagne during the opening of the dome on new year's eve came the leak that her staff are to receive Tesco Christmas puddings as their annual treat from Her Maj.

The decision was taken some weeks ago after discreet negotiations with Tesco, and Brenda was not happy to see the details spread all over the papers.

Only a leak from inside the palace could have provided such detail on where the 1,411 puddings are going (56 to the Royal Mews, 49 to Holyroodhouse, four to the Pollhampton stud, etc). Tesco bosses didn't know the details, just the bottom line of an order which attracted a £2,000 bulk purchase discount.

The Tesco puddings were chosen after a tasting session organised by the master of the royal household, Major-General Sir Simon Cooper. His department is regarded as leakproof. So where did the leak come from?

Elegant fingers are being pointed at the "communications" unit run by Simon Lewis whose job is to communicate information about Brenda that makes her appear ordinary – such as eating the people's Christmas pudding. Surely not!

● *The Queen's music 14*

THE Prison Service is experiencing difficulty in finding staff to keep an eye on inmates over the new year.

Officials decided to offer an extra £100 payment for those willing to celebrate the millennium behind bars – payable to anyone working after 5pm. Except that the day shift in most jail ends at 5.30. So most staff can pick up the extra dosh for simply lasting their usual shift, with no need to volunteer for night duty.

CHRISTMAS nearly arrived early for convicted paedophiles at Wandsworth prison, courtesy of governor Mick Knight.

Knight gave permission for inmates in the vulnerable persons section – which includes a very high proportion of paedophiles and sex offenders – to attend a Christmas concert which included performances by young children.

Wary of what might happen, staff at the jail expressed their concerns to the Prison Service. Three days before the concert was due to take place, the service pulled the plug on the Christmas treat and sent Peter Atherton, the service's south London area manager, to give Knight a serious bollocking.

Paul Boateng, prisons minister, has called for an inquiry into how convicted paedophiles nearly ended up being entertained by children and has not ruled out disciplinary action against Knight.

NEARLY four years on and it is gratifying to learn that the jury in the trial of brothers Kevin and Ian Maxwell *still* meets for regular reunions.

But do members ever invite speakers along to these meetings – distinguished guests with shared interests... such as the good Kevin Maxwell himself, perchance?

THE demands of fast turn-around newsgathering have fallen foul of the rigorous but useless security regime at White City.

Hacks rushing to record breaking stories must now have the appropriate paperwork to hand before Security will let them take so much as a tape machine off site. Bad news when you're trying to get to a story before the opposition.

A hack with a tape and microphone, for example, is now deemed to be making an "ad hoc removal", which requires a "Removals of Equipment form available from the Service Centre". Without this and the further authorisation required "via e-mail from your line manager" and you may as well stay put to watch the story break on ITN.

● *TV special 14, 15*

ROYAL CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

LAST MONTH home office ministers boasted that the "improved situation" at the chaotic immigration service headquarters in Croydon meant only 1,000 of its 5,000 daily phone calls now remained unanswered.

This was dire by anyone's standards and frustrating to those tens of thousands caught up in the huge backlog who are desperate to find out about their cases. But how has the service managed to achieve this target?

Sources say it is not because queries are suddenly being efficiently dealt with. It is simply because all calls are being cut off after three minutes.

A VERY prosperous new year to the partners at accountancy firm Ernst & Young, where profits are up 20 percent on the previous year.

The partners will be getting an average 17 percent increase, taking their remuneration to more than a third of a million pounds each.

Ordinary members of staff meanwhile will receive the grand sum of bugger all from the profit-related pay scheme because "the firm did not meet its budget for 98/99".

THE Kew Society is wondering whether to warn visitors to the Royal Botanic Gardens to wear hard hats after a fall of iced effluent from a plane flying overhead narrowly missed chairman Malcolm Welchman at lunchtime on 10 December.

Though Kew sits under a Heathrow flight path and residents have long complained about the noise and smell of kerosene, they have never had cause to fear freezing falls of off-coloured ice like this before. On balance they would still prefer a white Christmas to a yellow one.

LIVERPOOL solicitor Sean Sexton acts at all times in a thoroughly professional manner. Which must be why he charged the parents of murdered toddler James Bulger £90 an hour for attending the boy's funeral and talking to grieving relatives and the press for a total of five hours on 1 March 1993.

Prior to their divorce, Sexton acted for both James's parents, Ralph and Denise (he now only represents Denise). The legal bill he presented to the couple for his services from 1993 was £65,000, inclusive of VAT. The costs for this were met from money earned from media coverage of the case, and didn't leave much change for the Bulgers personally. Details of the bill came to light on the eve of the European court of human rights' ruling that the killers did not receive a fair trial.

Street Of Shame

IN a fit of seasonal generosity, milord Hollick has agreed to pay a £300 bonus to *Express* hacks who have to work on 31 December. But this pales into insignificance beside the bonus he has offered to catering staff for the same night – a wallet-boggling £1,000 each.

Is he planning to treat long-suffering hacks to a slap-up meal? Er, no: the cooks and waiters will be dealing with far more important customers. It transpires that *Express* directors and their families are intending to see in the millennium from the riverside dining room at the Grey Lubyanka, with an unrivalled view of the fireworks display on the Thames, and naturally expect a proper banquet.

Meanwhile, the hacks will have to make do with sandwiches.

WHEN London's snazzy new dance-club Fabric opened a couple of months ago to ecstatic publicity, only one newspaper challenged the hype.

"They're going for that thirtysomething Spirito de Punto naff creative lifestyle," club columnist Jacques Peretti complained in the *Guardian*. "It's all about the peripheral stuff older people love: smart bar stools and clean toilets you can snort your drugs off. That's not the point of going out at all."

However, yoof-obsessed editor Alan Rusbridger knows better: he chose Fabric as the venue for the *Grauniad*'s Christmas party, declaring on the invitation that it was "London's newest and hottest club". Entertainment consisted of a deafening concoction of funk, house and garage music served up by Funkmeister DJ Rocky and Bongo Massive, doubtless to the great delight of dance-crazed youngsters such as Peter Preston and Hugo Young.

STAFF at Buckingham Palace might have been tempted to count the silver after the visit earlier this month of Regional Independent Media millionaire Chris Oakley, who received a CBE for "services to journalism".

Shortly after the ceremony, the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) confirmed that sales figures on the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, *Birmingham Post* and *Sunday Mercury* had been falsely inflated by up to 17 percent during Oakley's reign. The culprit is still unidentified, but advertisers are demanding up to £20m compensation from new owners *Trinity Mirror*, and ABC is reviewing its supposedly watertight inspection procedures.

Oddly there was no mention on the business pages of Oakley's current flagship – the *Yorkshire Post* – of ABC's embarrassing findings. The paper *did* find room for a photo of its grinning proprietor sporting his well-earned CBE, though.

WHO was *Vogue*'s so-called movie "expert" who surveyed the century in cinema for December's "millennium issue"?

Whoever it was came up with some gems. "*The Jazz Singer*, released in 1927, was Greta Garbo's first talking movie." Er… an easy mistake to make given the close resemblance between Garbo and the picture's actual star, Al Jolson. After all, one often saw Garbo blacked up and down on one knee, arms outstretched and singing: "Mammy… I vant to be alone!"

"Movie icons: Josephine Baker, Clara Bow, Louise Brooks…" Odd that all Baker's movies were lost in that great fire at the Folies-Bergères.

And who was the "Bridget" Bardot who got two mentions? Perhaps she starred in that other film by Roger Vadim, *And God Created Wimmin*.

THE *Sun*'s answer to Polly Filler is airhead male columnist Mickey Hutton, whose principal subject matter is his wife, "Mrs H".

But who is this Mrs Hutton, an apparently Hob-Nob eating, gossiping slob but one who mysteriously acquires tickets to international rugby matches and lunches with B-list celebrities? Step forward Judy Maguire, editor of the Murdoch-owned *News of the World*'s *Sunday* magazine. Strangely, hubby Mickey seems reluctant to mention this.

SO Benjy "The Binman" Pell has been fined just £20 after pleading guilty to stealing rubbish from the bins of a London law firm whose clients include Jonathan Aitken and James Hewitt, an offence mitigated by his litter "obsession".

According to Eamon Sherry, leading for the crown at Blackfriars crown court on 22 November when Pell pleaded guilty to the theft: "Mr Pell has clearly got an obsession with waste and rubbish. This man has a severe debilitating illness which it would appear is untreatable."

One has to admire Pell for his ability over the years to turn a debilitating illness into an extremely lucrative business. Night after night neighbours would see Pell unloading dozens of bin bags (usually with Westminster markings) from his white van on to the lawn of the north London home he shares with his mother.

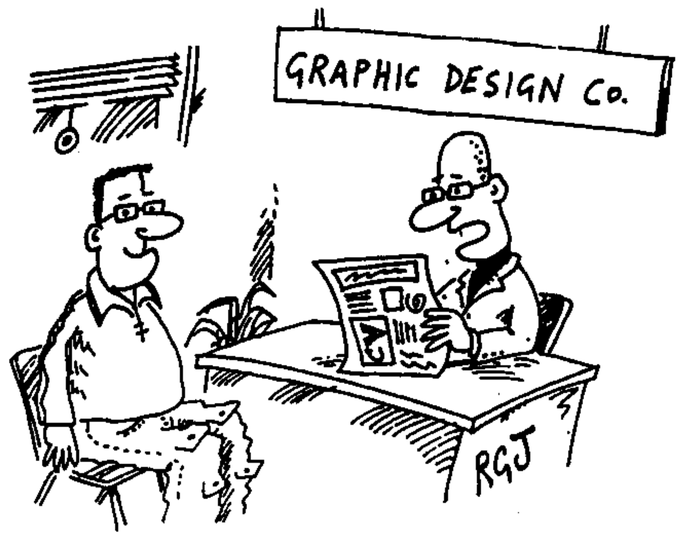
Pell, who is trained as a lawyer and not a journalist, could not always spot a story immediately, but a well-known name such as Jonathan Aitken, Lord Hollick or Elton John was usually a safe bet. He would then take the documents along to one of his contacts on a national newspaper who would either keep the story for their own publication or advise him on who else might be willing to pay for the material.

When Pell was finally arrested and searched at Marylebone police station in February, a cheque for £2,500 from News International was found on his person. If this is a representative example of the sort of money he could make from his dirty dealings, Pell has been at the very least fortunate to get away with a £20 fine for his – how can we put it? – grey collar crime.

LYNN BARBER could hardly contain her excitement. "I finally got it!" she told her editor at the *Observer*'s Life magazine, Sheryl Garratt. "Lucian Freud never gives interviews, but after years of negotiation I've finally persuaded him!"

Garratt, who is fondly known to colleagues as Jabba the Dolt, was unimpressed by this great *coup*, apparently regarding Freud as no big deal compared with heroes such as Damien Hirst. "I know all these artists," she announced loftily. "I can get for you to interview Francis Bacon if you want."

La Barber, showing uncharacteristic tact, decided not to inform her editor that Bacon is unlikely to grant any interviews since he is in fact dead.



"This CV is totally unreadable... you're hired!"

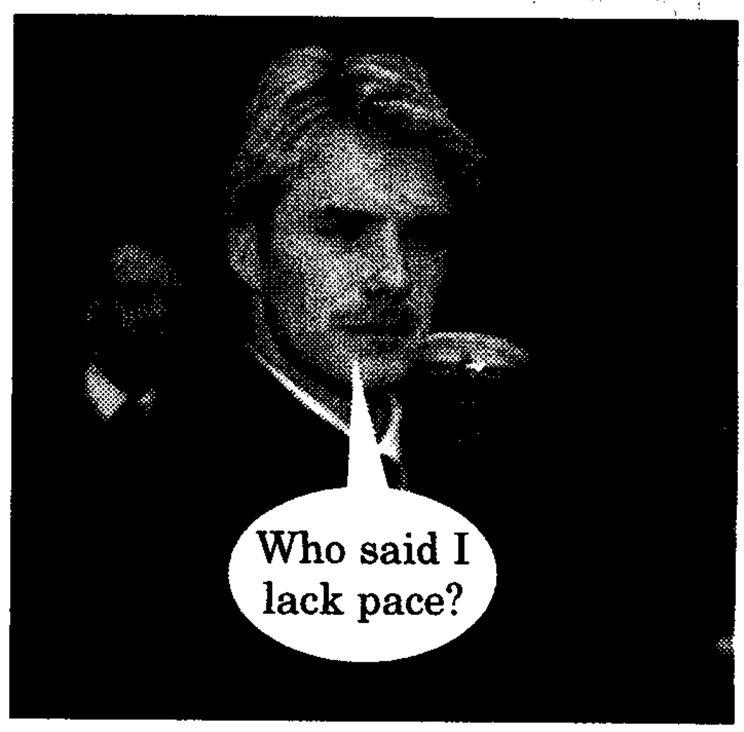
WHEN former BBC deadbeat Bob Phillis was hired as chief executive of the Guardian Media Group in 1997, his main task was to devise a strategy for dealing with the "paradigm shift" of the internet.

What this means, in plain English, is that the *Grauniad* is scared witless by the prospect of losing all its classified ads to online companies. Alan Rusbridger and his chums were counting on Phillis to come up with a Big Idea to ensure the newspaper's salvation.

And, a mere two years on, he has done it. Phillis's solution? That the *Grauniad* and *Observer* should buy a large stake in, er, Chris Evans's Ginger Media Group, which owns the flagging Virgin Radio and makes the pisspoor lottery show *Red Alert*.

Phillis's lack of commercial nous is matched by his management skills. A few weeks ago he rejected a pay claim from disgruntled *Observer* staff, explaining that the company had no money. Imagine the hacks' reaction when they learned that he had chosen this moment to spend £10,000 on hiring a PA for his PA (yup, an assistant's assistant), and another £10,000 on converting an office so that Phillis's chauffeur would have somewhere to drink his coffee!

BECKHAM IN BOX



MAX CLIFFORD is still nursing his wounds following the acquittal of Gary Glitter on charges of sexually assaulting a young teenager.

Clifford had sold her story to the *News of the Screws* for £10,000 plus an extra £25,000 if the ageing pop star was convicted. But the strategy backfired badly when the judge told the jury her testimony was tainted because of the money on offer.

Max's reputation as the supreme media fixer may take a further battering if the pending legal action by former client Mandy Allwood reaches the high court.

Allwood, who leapt to fame when she became pregnant with octuplets, alleges that he made hundreds of thousands of pounds in secret profits and did not "properly disclose and account for all monies paid by the media". She also claims he leaked her private address to the press – the very people she had hired Clifford to protect her from.

In her writ Allwood says that when she hired Clifford she asked for a written agreement. "I don't put things into formal contracts," he allegedly replied. But she allowed him to negotiate with the *News of the Screws*, which agreed to pay Allwood £250,000 if she delivered one or more of her babies. Clifford's share of the spoils was £50,000.

After her story was published, Allwood's relationship with her PR protector soured. The *Screws* tried to isolate her from its rivals, but she claims Clifford then tipped off the *Mirror* about her whereabouts. He then arranged an interview with German TV, saying she would be paid £50,000. He added that they might go up to £75,000 for world rights, but he advised against this. Later, however, she allegedly learned from the TV company that it had actually offered £250,000 for world rights, but that Clifford had held out for £350,000.

Several disputes about Clifford's "percentages" are mentioned in the writ. He allegedly told her that she would get £1,000 for appearing on *Richard and Judy*, but she later discovered the fee had been £2,500. She also claims that Clifford secretly acted for her former husband and sold a story to the *Mirror* for £20,000. Over dinner with Clifford, Allwood poured out her private thoughts and anxieties – which she believes were then leaked to the *Mirror*.

As it turned out, Allwood was unable to carry the unborn babies through to their full term. She instructed Clifford to keep the loss of her babies private, but claims that he promptly leaked the story – for which, she suspects, he was paid yet another fee.

The case could have serious consequences for Max Clifford. Not only has Allwod demanded damages, she has also applied for his accounts of all financial transactions with her.

The usually garrulous Max has been tight-lipped about the dispute, except to say: "I am extremely angry and saddened. Everything was done in the open. They have got records of everything. I did everything I could to help them in every way, both financially and also in a physical and spiritual way."

AS PART of his campaign to bring the *Torygraph* "on message" (see *Eye* 991), proprietor Conrad Black recently met with the Reverend Blair.

Sources close to Blair reveal that the Canadian media mogul emerged from the meeting believing the PM's politics to be even further to the right than his own.

HACKWATCH

Awards For 1999

Avoidance of Cliché

"The Page Three Girl for the Thrillennium!" — *The Sun* introduces Melinda Messenger and her assets, January 1997.

"Readers are planning to make the millennium a thrillennium." — *Sun*, 4 January 1999, revealing the results of its "exclusive poll": 59 per cent of Sun readers hope to have sex on millennium night "if possible" (a big if), and 52 per cent are hoping for "more sex in the year 2000".

"BABES FOR THE THRILLENNIUM. Irish women are the new millennium babes — girls with attitude, style and money." — *Mirror*, 26 January 1999.

"GEARING UP FOR THE THRILLENNIUM. Kitted out with Grand Prix-style helmet and visor — and little else — a de luxe model displays one view of how a classy girl will look on the beaches Down Under next year." — *Sunday People*, 15 May.

"SEX: GOING FOR THE THRILLENNIUM! Girls are set to take the new Thrill-ennium by storm — by demanding great SEX, exciting AFFAIRS and lots of FUN." — *Sunday People*, 23 May, revealing the results of its "exclusive poll": two thirds of women "expect their sex lives to get even better in the year 2000". ETC. ETC. ETC.

Lunchtime O'Booze Award

Outright winner: Don Mackay of the *Mirror*, who collected a prize at the British Press Awards dinner in March for his paper's "team reporting" of the Omagh bombing. Alas, it had been a long night, and Mackay was extremely tired: the splendid cut-glass trophy slipped through his fingers and smashed into a thousand pieces on the floor.

Later in the evening Mackay had a lively "discussion" with former colleague Geoff Sutton, and when *Mirror* sub-editor Lloyd Emburley tried to interpose himself between the combatants he got a bloody nose for his trouble. By the time Inspector Knacker arrived, however, Emburley could no longer remember who had hit him.

Following this triumph, Mackay was dispatched to the Balkans. "Can't understand a word you're saying," General Sir Mike Jackson told Mackay at a press conference in Macedonia. "Could you put the microphone next to your mouth?"

"It's normally a bottle next to my mouth," the *Mirror*man quipped.

"Yes," Jackson groaned, "I know."

In Kosovo, the hack's drunken antics so enraged *Mirror* photographer Roger Allen that he grabbed Mackay by the neck and tried to throttle him. Another *Mirror* hack then rang London to warn that Mackay was now "totally out of control". He was hastily recalled to Canary Wharf.

Runner-up: London *Evening Standard* hack Gervase "Barmy" Webb, who last won the O'Booze award two years ago after being found unconscious on the balcony of another *Standard* hack, naked but for his Calvin Klein underpants and attached to an equally tired, emotional and underclothed blonde hackette by a pair of pink, fluffy handcuffs. This year his best effort took place in the private room of London's Cobden Club, at a friend's birthday dinner: after singing *Deutschland Uber Alles* at the top of his voice, he gave a spectacular display of projectile vomiting over the tablecloth and several fellow-guests. "We all love Gervase," Ivor Hesmondhalgh, a director of the Cobden Club, told the *Eye*, "though I'd rather he didn't throw up over my wife and sister-in-law."

Mystic Meg Award

"Downing Street... would not order Gordon Brown to dismiss Charlie Whelan." — Andrew Grice, *Independent*, 4 January

"Gordon Brown sacrificed Charlie Whelan yesterday as Tony Blair sought to stabilise his government." — Andrew Grice, *Independent*, 5 January

"Whelan's position looks safe after Beckett tribute." — *Daily Telegraph*, 4 January.

"Whelan quits as Mandelson row rages on." — *Daily Telegraph*, 5 January

"Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, believes the forthcoming publication of a book by his former wife could fatally damage his career." — Patrick Wintour, first edition of the *Observer*, 10 January.

"The Foreign Secretary remains confident he will survive the onslaught." — Patrick Wintour, later editions of the *Observer*, 10 January.

"What if the ancient prophecies are right? What if this eclipse really does spell the beginning of the end of the world? Or what, for that matter, if it means the opposite? What if, as we all stare hopefully upwards at the sky, a ladder descends from the heavens? What if the creator steps gracefully down to walk among us all in human form once more?" — Jonathan Cainer, *Daily Mail*, 11 August, revealing his suspicion that "the eclipse does indeed herald an imminent day of judgment".

Most Bashful Hack

Nick Fisher, film reviewer of the *Sun*, who lavished extravagant praise on the teenage comedy romance *Virtual Sexuality* — "a virtual leap forward for the British film industry" — but neglected to mention that the screenplay was written by, er, Nick Fisher. When asked by the *Eye* if it might have been a good idea to declare his interest, Fisher replied: "You could argue that I should have been less modest about it..."

Burchill-Parsons Award

As usual, the trophy goes to the lovely Julie Burchill and her ex-hubby Tony Parsons. In the *Guardian* on 7 January, Julie suggested that the "bovine" and "matronly" Sophie Rhys-Jones "probably appeals to the type of perv who finds Jill Dando sexy". Three days later, in the *Mail on Sunday*, Tony duly drooled over Jill Dando, who "looks great in her slinky wraps on *Holiday*". After Dando's murder in April, Julie noted that Jill was one of those "blonde women who appeal to the sort of men who fetishise about clean, white cotton underwear... She appealed to a rather sad type of male journalist."

Most Shameless Freeloader

Jeremy Clarkson, who refuted the *Eye*'s suggestion that he had a Jaguar on "permanent loan" from the manufacturers by revealing that in fact he had *four* such Jags. "I've got lots of cars on free loans," he admitted cheerfully. "If they're really good I just don't give them back. Everybody does it. We've all got Jags." Might this affect his judgment? Perish the thought: "I'm quite straight. You don't last very long in this business if you start taking corporate backhanders."

Fog Of War Prize

"Britain's brave Harrier pilots blitzed the Serbs last night as Nato launched a devastating air bombardment." — *Sun*, 25 March.

"The RAF has successfully dropped only two bombs in the first four days of the air campaign, Gen. Sir Charles Guthrie, chief of the defence staff, said at the ministry of defence briefing yesterday." — *Daily Telegraph*, 29 March.

Most Sensitive Flower

Winner: Richard Littlejohn. "There is an uncomfortable element of jingoism underlying some of the reporting. I heard one reporter describing how missiles had 'slammed' into their targets in Montenegro... We are getting a war covered as if it were a football or boxing match." Thus Littlejohn's column of 26 March in the *Sun* — the paper which celebrated the outbreak of war with the front-page headline CLOBBA SLOBBA.

Runner-up: Harold Pinter, who wrote to the *Guardian* on 8 April protesting at the "pathetic if not infantile" level of argument about the Balkans. In an attempt to raise the tone of debate, he offered his own thoughtful assessment: "US foreign policy can be defined as follows: 'Kiss my arse or I'll kick your head in'. Milosevic refused to kiss America's arse so Clinton is kicking in the head of the Serbian people... Blair is the one who kisses Clinton's arse fervently and dreams that he is Mrs Thatcher."

Honourable mention: Alexander Chancellor. "The war in Kosovo has been making me miserable," he wrote in the *Grauniad* on 3 April, "because I cannot begin to understand what it is all about." But then he took a train back to London from an agreeable country-house weekend in Somerset, and found his first-class carriage crammed with lower-class passengers from Truro and Plymouth. Worse still, there was "an enormous queue for taxis" at Paddington. "One of the pleasures of living in England in the past was that one never had to endure any of the hardships of an Albanian refugee, but now it is possible to get a glimpse of their sufferings by the simple device of purchasing an expensive ticket from Great Western trains."

Quickest Memory Loss

"In a vain attempt to banish her girl-next-door image, the ever-bland Jill Dando posed in a black leather catsuit, à la Emma Peel, this week... What's the betting that underneath the skintight suit lurked a pair of waist-high cotton knickers and a nice, warm winceyette vest?" — Carole Malone, *Sunday Mirror*, 25 April (one day before the murder).

"This was a woman no one had ever been able to say or write anything bad about." — Carole Malone, *Sunday Mirror*, 2 May.

Most Uncanny Prophecy

"Who is responsible for the tide of trivia [in the *Guardian*'s G2 section]? Step forward ambitious features editor Ian Katz, an amiable chap, but not someone you would want on your side in the pub quiz team." — *Eye* 974, 16 April.

"How to become a pub quiz genius." — G2 headline, 26 April.

"In our look at the pub quiz, pages 2 and 3, G2, 26 April, we gave an answer to the question, when was Thomas a Becket killed?, but got it wrong. He died in 1170, not 1154." — *Grauniad.*

Most Sane Editor

David Yelland of the *Sun*, who in a recent interview recalled his paper's "big scoop" about Camilla Parker-Bowles meeting Princes William and Harry. Alas, the *Mirror* had got a smell of the story and banged it into its first edition, thus putting paid to the *Sun*'s hopes of entering it for a Scoop of the Year award. "I felt bloody awful," Yelland revealed. "I was close to tears."

Consistency Award

"On Wednesday, the deputy prime minister made such a comprehensive ass of himself in answering parliamentary questions that most of us thought we were attending a theatrical farce." — *Sunday Express*, 18 April, page 25.

"John Prescott's performance answering questions in the absence of Tony Blair has been much mocked and ridiculed... It says everything about the over-educated metropolitan press corps that they mocked this honest man who is instinctively trusted and respected by ordinary decent people." — *Sunday Express*, 18 April, page 39.

"FORGOTTEN" — *Mirror* headline, 3 August, above picture of Princess Diana and story claiming that "now it is almost as if she had never existed".

"She is far from forgotten." — *Mirror* editorial, 31 August, explaining why Diana's memory lingers on after all.

"The Cold War may be over but our fascination with the undercover war between East and West lives on. Espionage and its associated skulduggeries have always commanded intense interest." — *Daily Mail*, 13 September, page 11, after the outing of Melita Norwood.

"Now the old Soviet Union is gone, we've lost our fascination with spies." — *Daily Mail*, 13 September, page 13.

"It would be easy to say that James Hewitt sank to a new low with yesterday's magazine interview. But it would be wrong." — *Mirror*, 18 October, page 6.

"Love rat James Hewitt sank to new depths yesterday..." — *Mirror*, 18 October, page 7.

Diary Story Of The Year

Several judges admired the *Times* Diary's great scoop in April, which disclosed that Madeline Albright had been to the hairdresser. ("The secretary of state yesterday sat under the dryer at Hair Design in Georgetown.") But this was pipped at the post by the *Daily Telegraph*'s Peterbore, who revealed to an astonished world on 8 December that Sir Leon Brittan "has been sighted recently travelling from London to Yorkshire on a train... standard class".

Scoop

"I am quite confident that when the *Press Gazette* jury meets to discuss the Scoop of the Year, they will have to ask themselves one question — what is the biggest single one-fact story of the year? — and if they can think of something bigger than Cherie Blair pregnant at 45, then I intend to retire from journalism on the basis that I am completely misreading scoops these days. This is the biggest scoop of the millennium — I am standing by it." — Piers Morgan, *UK Press Gazette*.

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The Adverts (all commercial channels)

THEY want your money. They want it all, they want it now and they are prepared to do anything to get it. Christmas comes but once a year, which annoys the advertising industry enormously, but they're learning to live with it.

Television, thus, becomes a gruesome place at this time of year. The ads seem to increase in length and in number. Tinsel and holly are scattered promiscuously across the schedules. All the watchable programmes on commercial television are shoved out weeks in advance of Christmas to please advertisers rather than viewers. And the ads themselves seem to become more smug and overbearing as the days go by. Yesterday you saw Carol Vorderman promoting some health-soaked yoghurt filth and you laughed mockingly. Today you saw it again and felt the bile rising up in your throat. Tomorrow you will see it for a third time and feel the desire to murder somebody.

The perfume ads, as usual, are the most shameless. "Mouth to mouth," breathes a voice-over for Emporio Armani, as lots of poofy boys with sculptured eyebrows and anorexic teenage girls with collagen implants stare meaningfully at each other in black and white. "The two fragrances," says a girl. "Get together," says a boy, although the notion that anyone heterosexual was involved in the making of this commercial is laughable.

For Yves St Laurent's Paris, meanwhile, we see a woman on top of the Eiffel Tower kissing a man dangling from a helicopter, before the 'copter flies away and a small crowd applauds. The Parisians can get away with this, it seems, because they are more stylish than the rest of us, although every time you see it you still hope that she'll trip on a Japanese tourist and plunge to her death 984 feet below.

Nothing, however, undermines the studied cool of perfume ads more effectively than an Argos ad placed immediately after it. This year's campaign essentially consists of red and green flashing lights and Status Quo's Whatever You Want, and must have cost about 57p.

Most retailers seem keen to stress value for money this year rather than the huge amounts they have spent on advertising, probably after the dismal failure of Sainsbury's John Cleese campaign in 1998. Comet, for instance, has fallen back on the old trick of using its own employees, who, as in all ads featuring "real people", are made to look slightly half-witted as a consequence.

You learn so much from ads at this time of year. HP Sauce "makes a bacon sandwich". Lea and Perrins "for the ultimate cheese on toast". Sometimes, as in the Kingsmill ads featuring Mel and Sue, you can see whole careers ending before your eyes. At other times you just have to admire the advertisers' sheer gall. Norwich Union now announces itself with a version of the old anti-TUC pop song "You won't get me I'm part of the union", a political statement that is at best deeply ironic and at worst, perhaps after you have tried and failed to claim on your Norwich Union health insurance, fantastically offensive.

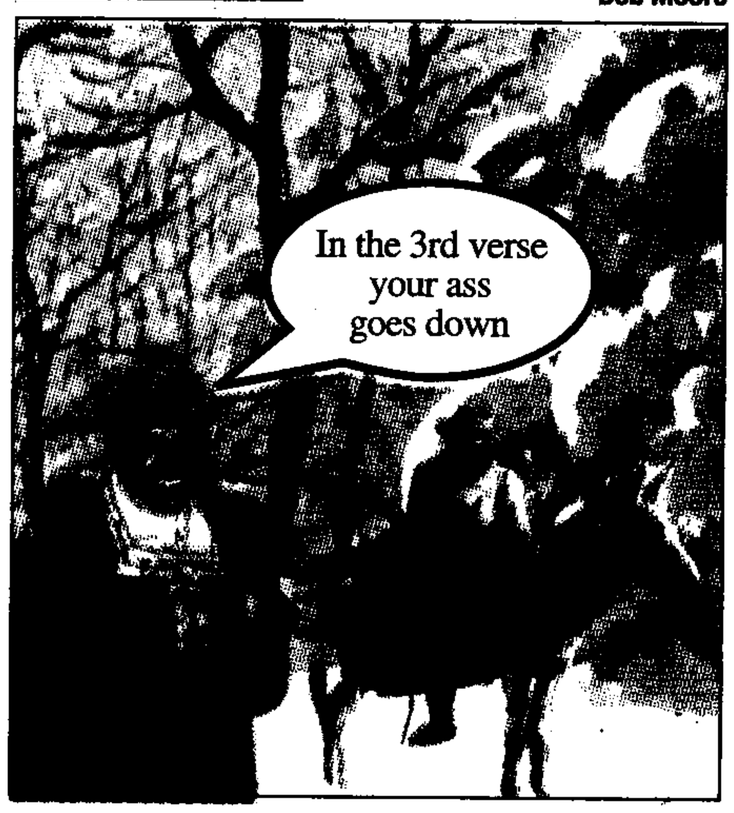
No less blatant is the AOL campaign, in which a lithe girl with short red hair leaps chummily out of a computer into a boy's bedroom, an image of some potency to most masturbating internet users. "Never more than a penny a minute," she trills, although by that stage they're not really listening.

The real boom in Christmas advertising this year, however, lies in mobile phones. "I've got something you can't find just anywhere," says Melinda Messenger in what presumably passes for a "sexy" voice in downtown Reading. She's lying, of course: she's got something you can find on Channel 5 most evenings, and as for her mobile phone, you can see it advertised 500,000 times a day on all commercial channels. The Vodaphone Scotsman, meanwhile, is now stuck in the Mojave desert wrapping up phones for Christmas. Is he planning to post them? Fortunately the Carphone Warehouse are on hand to make sure that you leave with the right phone for you, as are several other retailers all making much of their legendary honesty and reliability. And we believe them, don't we? We believe them all. Happy new year.

'Couch Potato'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



Don King Wenceslas

MUSIC OF THE MILLENNIUM

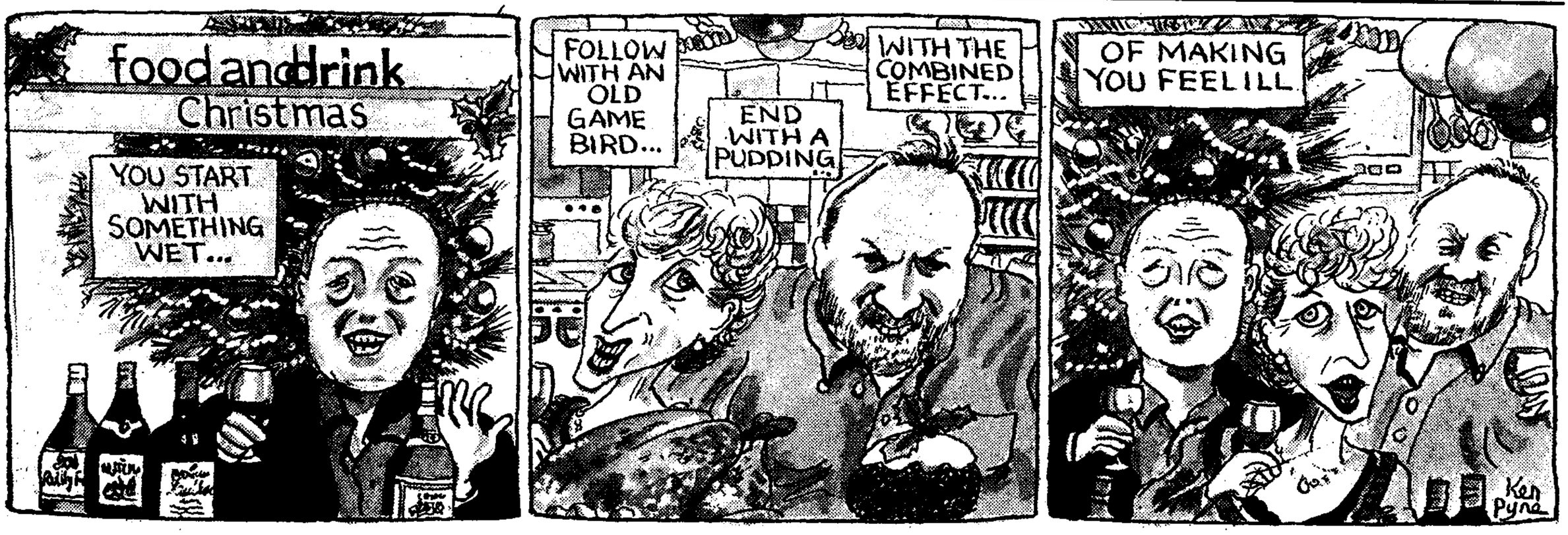
CULTURE secretary Chris Smith did not manage to ban black tie for musicians at the reopening of the Royal Opera House, but he is thrilled by the gear the poor English National Opera orchestra have been forced into for their starring role on the millennium eve party at the dome.

Hattie Barsby, "costume co-ordinator" for the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), seems to have been possessed by the spirit of Val Doonican when she designed their unisex ensemble. Out go fuddy-duddy black tie, tails and long black dresses; in come grey slacks and cosy cream pullovers under red boleros – *Come Dancing* meets *Richard and Judy*.

The musical selection to see in the new millennium is equally er… adventurous – chunks from Classic FM's top ten (a bit of Bach, Holst's Jupiter, Britten's Young Person's Guide, last section, etc,) will be seasoned with a dash of Lennon and McCartney and three digestible commissions for conductor Paul Daniels' old Cambridge chum Jonathan Dove. "Danny Boy" has been dropped, thank God, but Britain's best-known parents-to-be and the Queen will still be able to karaoke along to "Amazing Grace", "Auld Lang Syne" and "All You Need Is Love".

What Her Maj will make of Dove's reworking of the national anthem as a dance number remains to be seen. Following the chimes of Big Ben and "Auld Lang Syne", Britain will officially welcome the new millennium with a medley of nine numbers composed or arranged by Barrington Pheloung – composer of "Theme to Inspector Morse".

How utterly appropriate for the Dawn of the Blair Century.


food and drink Christmas
YOU START WITH SOMETHING WET...
FOLLOW WITH AN OLD GAME BIRD...
END WITH A PUDDING
WITH THE COMBINED EFFECT...
OF MAKING YOU FEEL ILL
Ken Pyne

EYE TV

Where We Are Now (all channels)

THOUGH strictly a Christian celebration, the millennium has now been largely claimed as a television event, a chance for the medium to show its possibilities.

On BBC1, a 28-hour *2000 Today* broadcast rolls on from new year's eve with Michael Parkinson and Gaby Roslin filling in for the differently absent Des Lynam and Jill Dando. On ITV, Sir Trevor McDonald and John Suchet anchor *Countdown 2000* while, on Channel 4, Johnny Vaughan goes all through the first night of the new millennium with *The Biggest Breakfast Ever*. The point is to claim for television an honour once floated by John Lennon for the Beatles — that TV is bigger than Jesus Christ.

But apart from the technical virtuosity of millennium night, what state is it really in?

Let's start with drama. It's against the predictions of most critics that the century should end with costume drama so dominant. ITV's *Oliver Twist* has performed so well for the commercial channel (audiences of around nine million) that the third channel can be expected to be raiding the library shelves next century as well, which — as mergers bring a single-entity ITV ever closer — is not at all where we expected them to be by now. The BBC is screening a new *David Copperfield* across Christmas Day and Boxing Day in another statement of serious intent.

But that is the high end of drama. At the shallow end, the state of plays is far more worrying. There are too many police series and the soaps are being stretched to the limits of their credibility by controllers desperate for four- and five-night servings of their most reliably rated shows.

News is another troubled area. The important thing is not that *News At Ten* moved slots but that the new bulletins and the various current affairs shows placed in its old slots — such as *Tonight With Trevor McDonald* and *Real Life* — are downmarket feature-based series which favour cosmetic scandal, sleaze and indignation over genuine stories.

With a failed relaunch of the BBC bulletins — bringing at tea-time an uneasy populist brew presided over by the stiff Huw Edwards — there has never been a time in the medium's history when it was so unsure about how journalism should be delivered. The old paternalist consensus that this part of the programming would be allowed to ignore the ratings pressure and aim high has been abandoned but replaced by conflicting bands of populism and pomposity.

Arts shows — traditionally a measure of the seriousness of a network — must now compete for slots and budgets as never before. On BBC2, Andrew Graham-Dixon's flawed but honourable *Renaissance* has struggled for viewers and review coverage and has already convinced some BBC executives that the audience is now too diverse for these exercises in education.

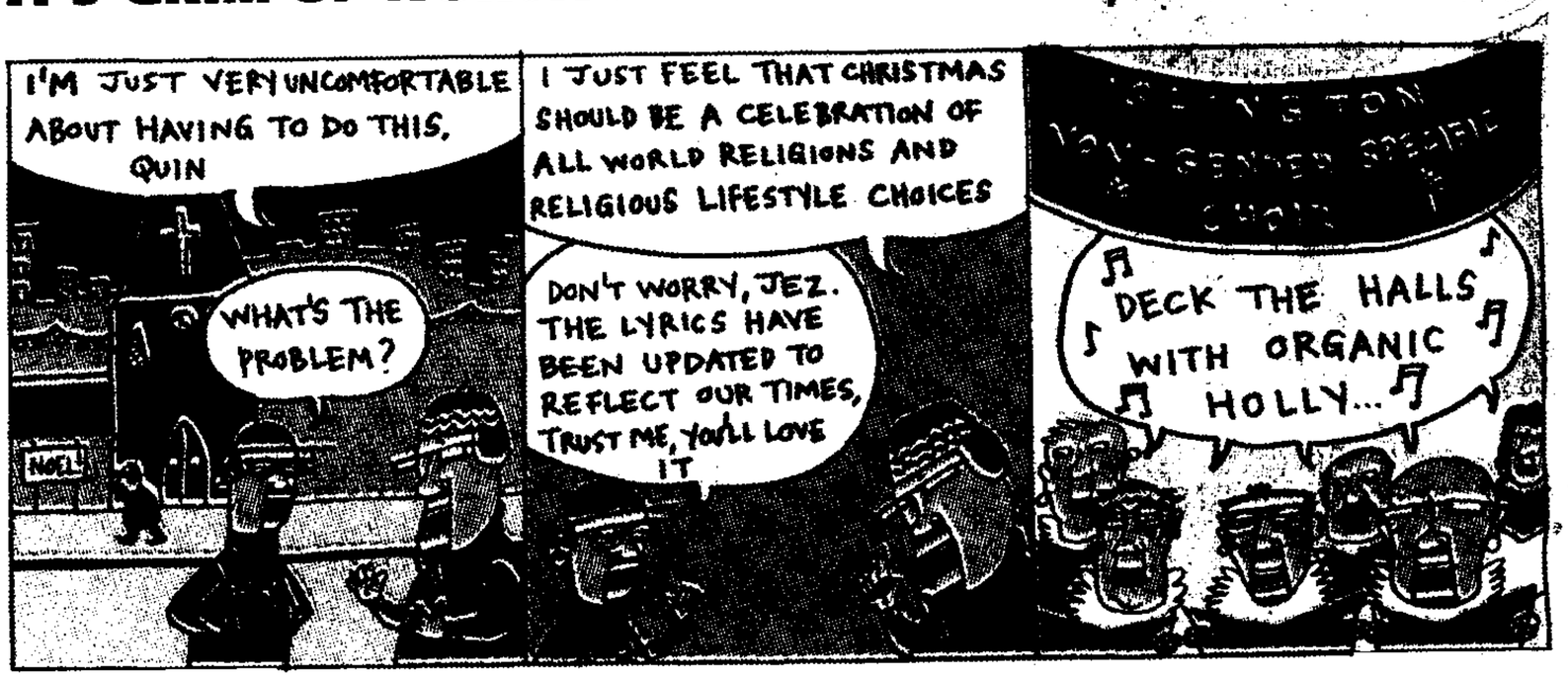
The remaining arts shows — *Late Review* and documentaries — are being bundled together in a Sunday mid-evening slot which, while better than the late-late-night spaces presently provided, is widely seen as a last chance for the arts. Channel 4 has virtually dispensed with such programmes and LWT's *The South Bank Show* — once not far off an Open University Course in culture for the general audience — has reported in its two most recent editions on Yoko Ono and Cher.

Sport is also a genre in crisis although for the opposite reason from arts. The problem here is not that the viewers don't want it but that they increasingly can't get it. While the BBC makes do with what's left — darts is getting a big push in the new year — satellite and digital channels hide football in particular behind ever more financial Chinese walls so that the cost of seeing the widest spread of matches now approaches £1,000. There is now every prospect that the 2002 football world cup will be the first to be unavailable to terrestrial viewers in Britain.

'Square Eyes'

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


I'M JUST VERY UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT HAVING TO DO THIS, QUIN
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
NOEL
I JUST FEEL THAT CHRISTMAS SHOULD BE A CELEBRATION OF ALL WORLD RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS LIFESTYLE CHOICES
DON'T WORRY, JEZ. THE LYRICS HAVE BEEN UPDATED TO REFLECT OUR TIMES, TRUST ME, YOU'LL LOVE IT
DECK THE HALLS WITH ORGANIC HOLLY...

OPERA NEWS OF THE YEAR

THIS year's notion – that opera has never been so popular – is frankly baffling to most people in the singing profession. But there is a stark contrast between the struggle many singers have to find enough work and the saccharine, Classic FM view of the Wonderful World of Opera.

Excellent singers are leaving the profession in droves, and those who are left need to work abroad for much of the year to earn a living. This is because the so-called popularisation of opera has actually done it a terrible disservice. It may be all right for Joe Public to buy the odd compilation album (how long before *The Only Sexy Arias You Will Ever Need*?), but it means that there is only work for the hyped few. The record companies have poured their money into the promotion of a blind tenor (Andrea Bocelli), an adolescent with a pubescent wobble (Charlotte Church) and er… Lesley Garrett. Even at the more serious end, huge stars have been made out of Ian Bostridge and Andreas Scholl with the help of some wistful photos and silly spectacles. Still, singers aren't the ones buying their recordings.

Artistic directors and critics are falling for the hype too. The other day Bob Kaiser, new md at the Royal Opera House, was only too glad to take part in a photo opportunity to welcome Bryn Terfel at the start of *Falstaff* rehearsals – but was too busy to make any appearance when the cast of the more obscure *Le Grand Macabre* turned up. When that show was cancelled two weeks later, Kaiser finally appeared to explain – but only after some singers refused to leave until he had done so. Many think the instigator of that particular debacle was the ex-director of Royal Opera, Nicholas Payne, who had been wildly over-ambitious, or possibly stupid, to plan such a technical production as *Le Grand Macabre* so soon after the arrival of unfamiliar new stage equipment.

The ROH has much to do if it is to reestablish itself as Britain's foremost company. As an international house, it may be a while too before it leaves the ranks of the second-rate. For all his declarations to the contrary, Jeremy Isaacs' legacy as md has been pitiful; and there are few in the company who wouldn't cast him as the real villain. Rumours now suggest Antonio Pappano will not take up his position as music director, and that Bernard Haitink, whose qualities as an opera conductor might be described as, er, ambiguous, will stay for yet another year. This would probably not be good news for the company, but would give Haitink yet more opportunities to offer his resignation. He must already hold some sort of record.

If there is a theme to the year's opera news, it is one of a huge wealth of vocal and artistic talent (the quality of performers has probably never been better) struggling to cope with the inadequacies of funding and management. In a political climate that regards opera with suspicion and classical music as un-cool, English National Opera has chugged along while the Coliseum crumbles around it. Scottish Opera struggles on, half the company it was a decade ago;

GREY ARIAS

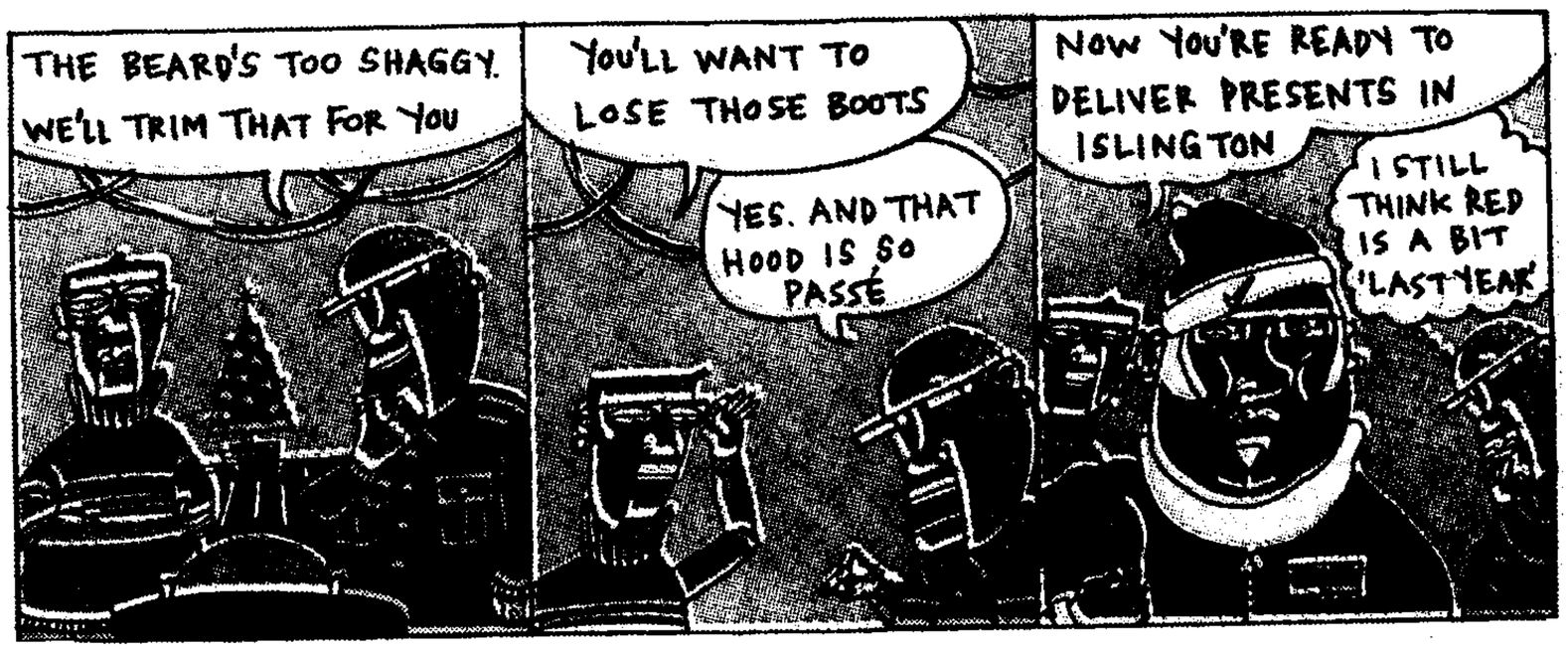
"Das Leader von der Nerde"

and Welsh National Opera continues to cope with its appalling venues.

Opera North came up with the ingenious and economical idea of mounting three new productions on the same set, which worked rather well; and Glyndebourne is said to be trying the same thing, but probably less happily as it continues its Graham Vick/Mozart cycle. The stage crew are pleased as they will have very little work to do; but punters who expect something a little more lavish may be less so when they are faced yet again with what appears to be the inside of a rehearsal room, the setting for Vick's dismal *Cosi fan Tutte*.

Glynditz, to use its more popular moniker, has been enjoying a good spell, but predictions for the future are gloomy under its new management. Nicholas Snowman has not been a popular choice – and even Glyndebourne's Christie family is said to be having its doubts.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'


THE BEARD'S TOO SHAGGY. WE'LL TRIM THAT FOR YOU
YOU'LL WANT TO LOSE THOSE BOOTS
YES. AND THAT HOOD IS SO PASSÉ
NOW YOU'RE READY TO DELIVER PRESENTS IN ISLINGTON
I STILL THINK RED IS A BIT 'LAST YEAR'

"NEW" Labour spin doctors have spent much time and effort rubbishing one of the central allegations in a recent *Panorama* investigation: that the party's formidable general-secretary Margaret McDonagh expedited the decision to hand over crucial membership lists to Frank Dobson.

As the denials grow ever more hysterical, however, the programme's lawyers, who have viewed the extensive evidence compiled by veteran reporter John Ware and his team, are convinced that *Panorama*'s case would be water-tight in the event McDonagh should decide to confer with m'learned friends. Indeed, some might even welcome a challenge.

According to *Panorama*, when McDonagh presented the rules for London's mayoral contest to Labour's national executive committee (NEC) in October, she gave a categorical assurance that party membership lists would not be given to any candidate – not least because the data protection act might prevent this from being legal.

Within days, however, Paul Lettan, a volunteer Frank Dobson campaign worker, claimed to have seen computerised membership records of London Labour party members being accessed in Dobson's campaign office by a colleague, Luke Akehurst, and his partner Linda Smith, a party official.

Smith forms part of a team of aides employed as assistants to London's four MEPs, including the newly elected Claude Moraes. It is alleged that Smith, knowing that Moraes was entitled to ask for a membership list, asked him to do so. A call was subsequently made by Moraes to another unnamed senior party official, as was another by Richard Balfe MEP, who subsequently boasted soliciting party membership lists for use by the Dobson campaign.

Panorama's attempt to interview McDonagh, in order to ask her to confirm whether she had received a telephone call from the unnamed official to expedite the request, was turned down. In the meantime, Labour spin doctors went into overdrive to deny that any call of this nature had taken place. This charade was maintained almost up until *Panorama* was broadcast, when it was admitted for the first time that the telephone call from the unnamed senior official had taken place, but – it was then claimed – it had been received by Labour's head of operations, Jackie Stacey.

Stacey declined to be interviewed by *Panorama* as well, but the idea that she sanctioned the print out of the 70,000 odd membership list, and prioritised the request over other more immediate tasks without recourse to McDonagh, seems unlikely in the extreme.

Meanwhile the hugely peeved Glenda Jackson, who in common with Ken Livingstone has not had favoured access to Labour's membership list, is anxiously scanning the transcript of the *Panorama* programme. When it becomes as obvious to her as it does to a handful of more seasoned Labour officials of the old school that the election could be ruled "null and void" on the basis of *Panorama*'s investigation, she may well choose to consult with m'learned friends.

And should the data protection registrar concur with *Panorama*'s findings, the luckless Dobbo could face criminal action, or at the very least stand down from the contest. All of which may stretch the London mayoral pantomime season well into the new year!

MEMBERS of Tessa Jowell's Dulwich constituency Labour party are beginning to wonder if the pressure of work is getting to their MP.

She fired off yet another "Vote Dobbo" letter to local members in which she wrote: "I would not vote for Ken Livingstone. Too many of my constituents were betrayed and let down by Lambeth Council under Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight.

"The simple truth is that the politics of the GLC were not popular with electors. During that time we lost by-election after by-election in London, including Bermondsey. A year after the GLC was abolished Labour in London slumped to its worst General Election defeat in memory. We must not risk returning to these days."

Indeed not. But did these days ever exist? As a London-based leftwinger in the early 80s, Jowell should know that:

Ted Knight was leader of Lambeth council; Livingstone led the GLC. Leninspart may have been mates with Red Ted, but at no time did he hold any responsibility for the affairs of Lambeth.

Leninspart's GLC was for a period popular with Londoners. Neil Kinnock's Labour party wasn't. Labour lost the 1987 general election, while the GLC was simply abolished with the stroke of Maggie's pen.

The Bermondsey by-election took place at a time when most Londoners had never heard of Ken Livingstone. Voters in Bermondsey had however heard that Peter Tatchell – the Labour candidate who lost spectacularly to the saintly Simon Hughes – was a prominent gay activist who favoured extra parliamentary action and who, on that basis, had been denounced by Labour leader Michael Foot just days before polling began.

FRANK DOBSON's unequivocal support for a public private partnership (PPP) to run London Underground comes as little surprise.

As health secretary he signed many similar private finance initiative (PFI) deals for hospitals. But if these are anything to go by, the tube PPP could prove an extremely costly exercise.

One of Frank's more notable PFI schemes was that of University College Hospital (UCLH) in his own constituency of Camden (see *Eye* 956). A new "super hospital" near Euston station will be built and run for the next 32 years by the Health Management Group, a consortium made up of Amec, Balfour Beatty and the Buildings and Property Group.

The grand plan has been somewhat tarnished, however, by the revelation that the original estimate of £160m for building the hospital has now soared to £280m. The consortium will then charge the health authority around £30m a year to let the hospital. And while the old hospital had 750 beds, the new one will have just 628.

THE *Eye*'s favourite computer firm EDS will make a promising start to the new millennium when in April it takes delivery of another massive tranche of government machinery in the name of modernising Britain's welfare state.

Out of 2,200 staff at the information technology systems agency (ITSA) division of the department of social security, 1,500 are due to become employees of EDS rather than civil servants. EDS signed a 10-year contract with ITSA in October 1995 estimated at the time to be worth £600m.

These staff will help develop a computer system offering a one-stop benefits shop, thus improving "efficiency and customer service" – a tall order given EDS's talent for bringing government agencies to their knees (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

IN THE season of goodwill, *Eye* readers are asked to think of those less fortunate than themselves, particularly those hapless tycoons who have fallen victim to the Curse of Blair.

They include Lord Sainsbury, Lord Haskins of Northern Foods and Bob Ayling of BA, all of whom cosied up to "new" Labour – and then watched their companies' profits and share-prices plummet.

A particularly tragic victim is Paris Moayedi, chief executive of Jarvis plc. Jarvis was quick to clamber aboard the Blair bandwagon: at last year's party conference, for instance, it sponsored a conference-dinner for Blair's "leadership campaign team" and selected Labour councillors, addressed by John Prescott and local government minister Hilary Armstrong.

The company also had the sense to hire a Labour peer, Lord Hogg of Cumbernauld, as a consultant, and set about bidding for every PFI contract in sight. Jarvis's directors collected huge seven-figure share options, and Moayedi celebrated his good fortune by commissioning a palatial villa for himself in the West Indies. Trebles all round!

Not for long, however. A year ago, Jarvis had a market value of £922m; today, it has nosedived to £273m following a disastrous fall in profits.

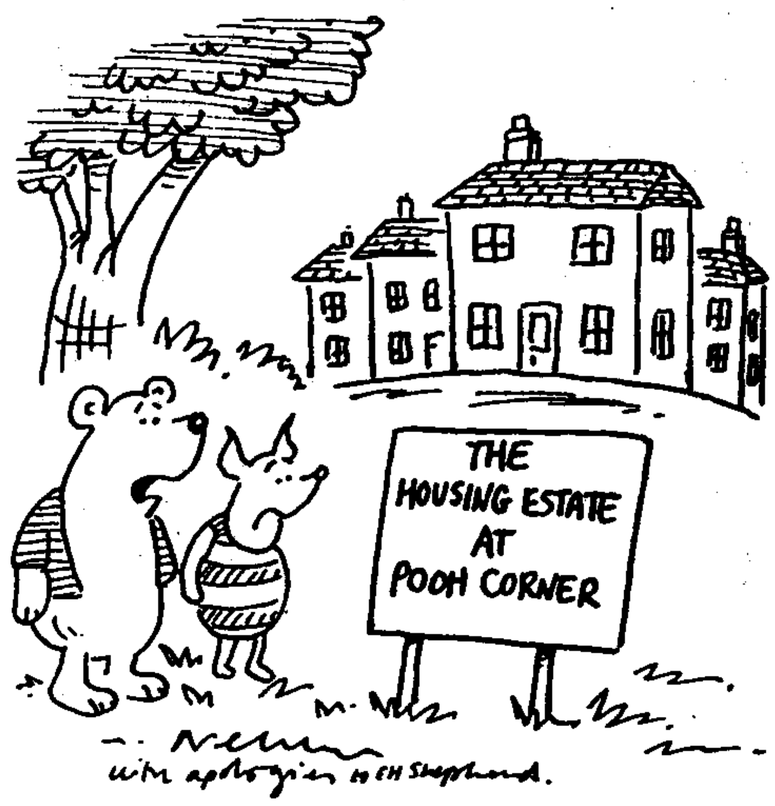
What went wrong? The trouble, it seems, was that Jarvis became dangerously dependent on one client: it won no less than 70 percent of Railtrack's maintenance contracts, and only avoided being referred to the monopolies commission by hiving off its track-laying plant company. As *Sunday Business* revealed recently, Jarvis was making profit margins of 13 percent on its Railtrack work – twice the industry average – but with Railtrack coming under increasing pressure to cut costs this gravy-train was bound to hit the buffers, as indeed it now has.

Moayedi tells *Sunday Business* his company is diversifying into "road traffic management and facilities management". What this turns out to mean, in plain English, is painting white lines on roads.

QUOTE OF THE YEAR

"Green Belt land is actually *increasing*, not decreasing."

— Tony Blair, Prime Minister's Questions, December 1999



"There goes the Green Belt"

WHY is Tony Blair hellbent on using £200m of taxpayers' money to support the Ilisu dam project in south-east Turkey – which will leave 20,000 Kurds homeless, destroy one of the most ancient towns in the world and may well precipitate a "water war" with Syria and Iraq?

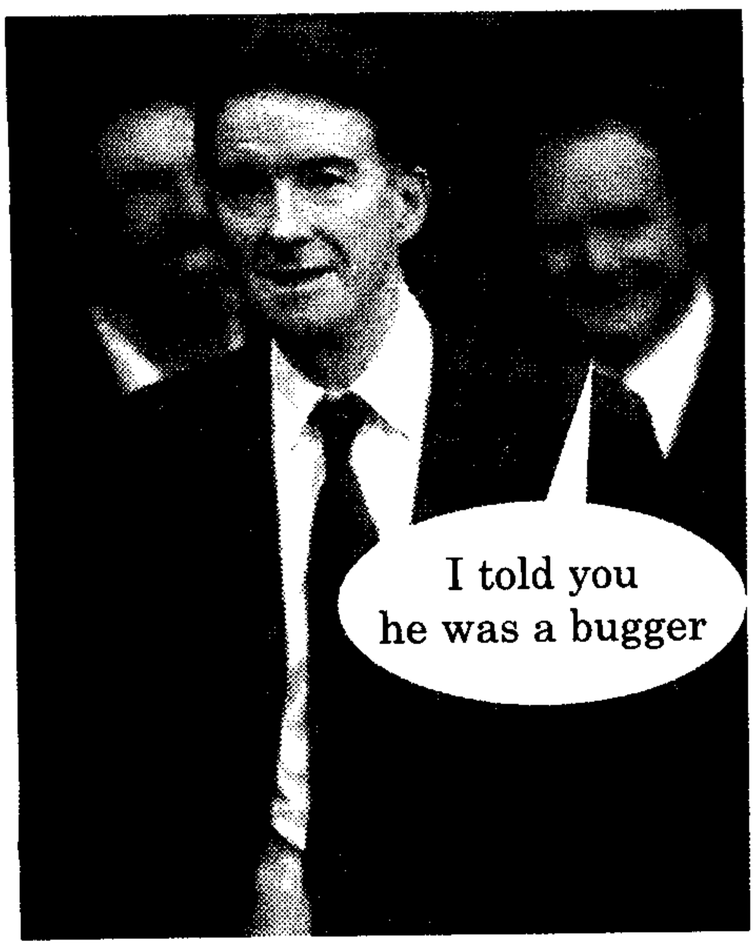
He certainly can't be accused of courting popularity. The dam scheme is opposed on ethical and environmental grounds by many of his senior ministers, including Robin Cook, and has been fiercely condemned by organisations as diverse as Friends of the Earth and the World Bank. Foreign governments, too, have joined the chorus of disapproval.

The only possible explanation is that Tony is pandering to big business – and specifically to the construction giant Balfour Beatty, which leads the consortium building the Ilisu dam.

This might seem odd to the untrained observer. For Balfour Beatty was also involved in the Pergau Dam affair, out of which Labour made so much political capital while in opposition. During a Commons debate in February 1994, for instance, Michael Meacher referred to the £234m of taxpayer's money spent on Pergau and said that Whitehall objections to aiding the project had been overruled "because it offered a huge construction contract to Balfour Beatty and Cementation who are also major contributors to the Tory party". Jack Cunningham denounced the assistance for Balfour Beatty as "an abuse of power by a Conservative government". Why, then, would a Labour prime minister now wish to ape the Tories by backing an even more controversial dam project undertaken by Balfour Beatty? Those seeking an answer to the mystery should consider the following facts:

- In recent years, by assiduous schmoozing, Balfour Beatty has transformed itself into one of "new" Labour's favourite companies. One of its executives, Martin Print, was seconded to the department of trade and industry's "innovation unit" as soon as Labour won the general election. Two other Balfour Beatty staff, Colin Ostler and Alastair Kennedy, have accompanied construction minister Nick Raynsford on jaunts to Jordan, Egypt and the Philippines.
- Sir Malcolm Bates, architect of the private finance initiative (PFI) and one of Blair's heroes, was chosen by the government this year as the ideal man to chair London Transport. Until his appointment he was a director of BICC – the parent company of Balfour Beatty.
- Balfour Beatty's political lobbying is conducted by GJW Government Relations, which employs such luminaries as Karl Milner, formerly an adviser to Gordon Brown, and Roger Sharp, who previously worked in Labour's "business unit". GJW is one of Labour's most loyal sponsors, and has regularly booked tables at the party's "gala fund-raising dinners".

NOOKS and CORNERS



WELL KNOWN to Suffolk voters as an amateur magician, John "The Great Gummo" Gummer has perfected a new illusion: concealing his interests.

Delegates at last week's English Heritage conference on the listing of cinema buildings heard Gummer – not billed as a representative of anyone but himself – speak on "Cinemas as agents of urban regeneration", a reasonable enough topic for a former environment secretary to tackle.

They were rather surprised, however, when he delivered instead a petulant tirade on the inflexibility of English Heritage. He was particularly upset about the unfair way in which the ABC chain has been prevented from hacking apart, in the name of progress, some of the listed buildings that it owns.

In front of a room full of preservationists, he dismissed the company's totally unspoilt 1930s building at Esher as "not a particularly good cinema", complaining that ABC's plans for "improvement" had been vetoed by EH. By the time he reached his peroration, all pretence has been dropped: all the examples he gave were of ABC properties, and he was referring to the company with a corporate "we".

What is the relationship between Gummer and ABC, and why did none of the company's executives feel able to do the job themselves? There is no mention of his cinematic loyalties in the register of members' interests, but he does declare his chairmanship of Sancroft International, an "environmental consultancy" – which, it transpires, is retained by ABC.

SHADOW transport minister John Redwood crowed with delight when John Prescott lost his transport brief to Lord Macdonald, but he really should be chastened by his own lack of expertise.

He recently published a critique of the car-parking facilities on his local railway line, prompting the local newspaper to print two letters rejecting his claims accompanied by a photograph with the caption: "Come on John, you should get around more!"

Moreover he shares a passion with the other John, having opted to drive his new Jag to the Tory party conference because he didn't want "to change trains in London". Had he checked the timetable he would have discovered there is at least one through train a day from Reading, near his Wokingham constituency, to Blackpool.

In 1995 one of Redwood's constituents wrote to him complaining about the Tory government's measly investment in British Rail compared with governments in France and Germany. In response he then wrote: "The European average of expenditure is far higher because they have not suffered the same kind of decline as the result of a nationalised monopoly that we have suffered."

It apparently escaped him that the national rail systems in other EU countries are in fact nationalised monopolies.

THERE is no sign of a Christmas truce among the nattering nabobs of the UK Independence Party: the long-running feud between the party's leader Michael Holmes MEP and his national executive finally reached the high court as the *Eye* was going to press.

The gist of the case is that Holmes thinks the executive should resign, while they think he should.

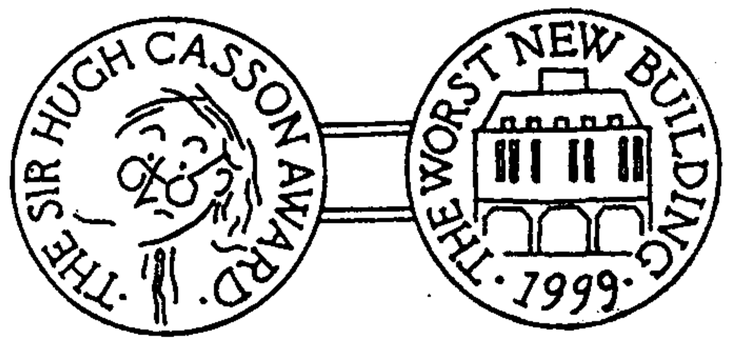
In a recent letter to members, Holmes described the national executive as "whingeing", "grudging", "recalcitrant", "out of touch" and "consumed by envy and resentment". This provoked an equally outspoken email from Tony Bennett, who works as a paid assistant to Holmes's UKIP colleague and fellow-MEP, Jeffrey Titford.

Holmes, as usual, went ballistic. "Since Jeffrey Titford has been unable to contain the wilder excesses of your hysterical behaviour, it seems that challenge now falls to me," he replied. After several paragraphs denouncing Bennett's "abusive general demeanour" and "libellous inaccuracies", he concluded: "Would you now confirm whether it is true you are a born-again evangelical Christian? If it is, I am staggered at your total lack of charity towards others. I can only say that, as an agnostic, I am mightily relieved that I shall not have to spend Eternity in your company."

God rest ye merry, Eurosceptic gentlemen...

'Backbiter'

THE LAST issue for 1999, so it is time to choose the winner of the Sir Hugh Casson Medal for the worst or most ridiculous new building of the year — or of the decade, perhaps of the century or even of the last millennium if I am to get into the ridiculous journalistic hyperbole that deludes itself into thinking on so unimaginable and meaningless a scale.



But first, what of Casson? Since his recent death I have been asked if it is appropriate that the eponymous medal should continue to be awarded annually. It is no secret, of course, that this column for long waged war on the man and attempted to make him — I like to think with a degree of success — into a figure of fun. But now? *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum* and all that. But, frankly, why not? Besides, the Casson Medal has surely become the most prestigious of architectural awards: the Pritzker, the Stirling, the RIBA Royal Gold seem tawdry in comparison: they, after all, are merely given by cronies to each other.

But I must try to be fair. The great thing Casson did — for which he got his handle — was to organise the Festival of Britain. That was a triumph, not least architecturally. The permanent legacy of 1951 is, of course, the Royal Festival Hall; but other structures were raised on the South Bank which were of great merit, like the Skylon and the Dome of Discovery, both of which could have been reerected elsewhere if the festival site had not been cleared with indecent and malicious haste by the late, unlamented David "Smarty Boots" Eccles, the new Conservative government's Minister of Works.

Now the Dome of Discovery, designed by Ralph Tubbs, made innovative use of aluminium construction and was also a remarkable shape — not just a saucer on stilts but a more interesting geometrical form which resulted from the containing circular sloping drum not being concentric with the domed roof. No such subtleties are evident in the rather larger and rather more banal would-be "dome" now raised, or hung, in North Greenwich in dubious celebration of the advent of the next millennium.

Now there is much to say about the Greenwich dome: that it is a curious way of spending umpteen billion of public and lottery subscribers' money when "new" Labour finds it cannot afford to open our museums and art galleries to the public free, or pay for a decent railway and public transport system such as the citizen of any civilized European country enjoys. (And thinking of foreigners, it is surely interesting that the French and the Germans, say, have not found it necessary to make such a fatuous millennial gesture while the Italians are spending money, appropriately, on restoring historic monuments in Rome. How very uncool.)

Of course the dome has given us all a great deal of pleasure. The idea of proposing a huge circular plastic tent and getting us all to pay for it when nobody had the faintest idea what to put in it might seem entertaining — how different, how significantly different, are the stories of the Festival of Britain and the Great Exhibition of 1851 — and the saga has been enlivened by the walk-on parts by such comic figures as Stephen Bayley, "style guru" [sic], and Peter Mandelson. But all this, at least from the point of view of the Sir Hugh Casson Medal, is beside the point.

I am concerned with the once noble Mother of the Arts: architecture. And, as architecture, the dome is a complete flop. It may contain the largest space in the world and be a technical triumph, but the concept is simply banal. It is not a true dome but a tent (unheated and unheatable) with a plastic roof suspended from masts by a forest of cables. And, as a suspended structure, it really is not very interesting or imaginative in its form. Furthermore, paradoxically, despite its vast size, it has no physical presence — unlike the admirable Dome of Discovery which was raised up on its peripheral stilts. This dome is an upside down saucer on the ground, a form which, by its very nature, is the negation of impressive monumentality as it tends to disappear the nearer you get to it. Furthermore, although it may be big and round, it does not actually fit on to its polluted site on a bend in the Thames. Why not? Because there was a pre-existing structure there which could not be removed: a ventilation shaft for the second Blackwall Tunnel below.

This is a bold concrete Expressionist thing designed by Terry Farrell when a young architect working for the GLC in the 1960s. So the concept of the dome is exploded by having a large hole in it surrounding the (much more interesting) ventilation shaft — a flaw which is carefully avoided in all the official photographs.

But although the dome is anti-architecture, it is nevertheless a monument to the unhealthy degree of power now wielded by a handful of fashionable architects. It was ostensibly designed by My Lord Rogers of Riverside; in fact, it was the concept of somebody in the office of the Richard Rogers Partnership. Like so much so-called High Tec design, the inspiration was Dan Dare — in this case, the sort of mind-blowing helmet that the Mekon might have used on his enemies. But so powerful — and charming — is My Lord Rogers that he managed to persuade successive governments, Conservative and Labour, to build such an old-fashioned toy even though it had (and has?) no purpose. So this extravagant, vapid gesture is surely the only possible contender for the Sir Hugh Casson Medal for 1999. In fact, in relation to its cost, it must be the most stupid public work of the past 60 years.

Sixty years ago, as it happens, another colossal dome was being planned: by Albert Speer, as the focal point in Berlin, to be renamed Germania. The purpose of that stone, concrete and steel domed hall was clear: to contain crowds to listen, enraptured, to the Führer's speeches. And it was designed to last a thousand years (although it was never begun, of course). Even the Crystal Palace lasted for more than 80 years and was only destroyed by accident while the Festival Hall is still with us. In contrast, Rogers' dome, the focal point of Blairmania, designed to contain the hot air of Cool Britannia, will only have a life of a decade or so, despite its astronomical cost, because it is only made of plastic. A mercy, perhaps. Give me the Big Wheel.

'Piloti'

DOING THE ROUNDS

ON 17 December 1994, the *British Medical Journal* ran a series of articles about secrecy and the rise of Stalinism in the NHS. Editor Richard Smith had sat between a senior nurse and a senior NHS manager "who were convinced that the NHS was becoming an organisation in which people were terrified to speak the truth."

At that time it was common place for trusts to insert gagging clauses in staff contracts to try to override their nationally agreed terms and conditions of service which state: "A practitioner shall be free, without prior consent of the employing authority, to publish books, articles, etc, and to deliver any lecture or speak, whether on matters arising out of his or her hospital service or not." The *BMJ* listed 30 examples of secrecy and suppression, quoting Labour opposition stalwarts such as Dawn Primorolo and John Smith defending the right to openness in the NHS and freedom to speak out.

The articles provoked a swift response from Alan Langlands, then (and still) chief executive of the NHS Executive, who claimed the "evidence" of Stalinism in the running of the NHS "does not warrant the exaggerated claims made for it". "I am appalled at the thought that there remain in the NHS some people who feel that they work in a climate that prevents them from freely expressing their views. That is not the kind of organisation I wish to lead. I do not believe that there is any place for 'confidentiality for commercial reasons' in the family of the NHS" (*BMJ* 21 Jan 95).

In 1996, when — according to the *Health Service Journal* — "managers' reticence about posing awkward questions seemed to have reached absurd heights", Sir Alan rode into the Institute of Health Services' Management conference and reassured everyone that it was fine by him for managers to express views with which he might disagree, or point out inconvenient truths. Alas, Sir Alan had clearly not anticipated life under "new" Labour.

Just a year after Alan Milburn heaped praise on the Healthcare Financial Management Association (HFMA) for sorting out "the mess" Labour had inherited, Sir Alan has rebuked the same NHS finance directors for publishing an authoritative and well-reasoned estimate of the income and expenditure deficit the NHS is heading for this year (£200m).

Ex-HFMA chair Eric Morton and incoming chair Barry Eliot have both enjoyed a private dressing down from Sir Alan for doing precisely what he encouraged them to do a few years ago. "We are not paid to bleat about resources," raged Sir Alan. "We are not paid to undermine the service entrusted to us." New Labour, New Stalinism.

● IN October 1995 an appeal was started to raise money for a specialist breast care centre at Glenfield Hospital in Leicester: £1.3m was raised entirely by public donation, the centre started treating women in May 1999 and was officially opened by Frank Dobson who described it as a "wonderful new facility".

And so it is, with screening, diagnostic imaging, one-stop consultations and counselling all in one

"Of course there's no room here – try the inn"

centre. It also has a very active breast cancer research team. Although perhaps for not much longer. In November, Leicester health authority announced proposals to downgrade Glenfield hospital and transfer its breast care and cardio-thoracic services to Leicester General Hospital. This shock announcement came after the health authority had encouraged the fundraising for the breast care centre on the Glenfield site.

In three weeks a petition against closure has gathered 110,000 signatures. The transfer of cardiac and thoracic services is equally inexplicable since it was only in 1991 that Trent regional health authority unanimously decided to relocate them to Glenfield. This after it was decided that the site at Leicester General was too cramped and the Glenfield facilities were spacious and new. As one consultant put it: "We are not generally against the merging of hospitals and the centralisation of resources, but these two proposals are just completely nonsensical."

● ONE NHS employee clearly not afraid to speak out is junior doctor Paul Benson, who is furious that the pay and conditions deal offered by ex-health secretary Frank Dobson was hailed as a "victory for junior doctors" in the press. "Never have I witnessed such a distortion of the truth."

Dr Benson is disgusted that the co-author of a celebratory report was non-other than the junior doctor chairman Andrew Hobart. "During the (subsequent) junior doctor committee meeting there was outrage, with many calling for Mr Hobart to resign. He broke down in tears on three occasions. While this was clearly a personal display of emotion, was it the action of a strong negotiator and leader?"

Dr Benson alleges that the juniors' right to vote on strike action was "sabotaged by the withdrawal of support for a ballot by the BMA chairman Dr Ian Bogle". The problem — as ever — is that as demands on doctors are increasing, their hours can only come down if more doctors are employed (and they take a while to be trained). In the meantime Dr Benson was hoping the pecuniary incentive of punitive overtime rates might help force the hours down a bit, but Dobson's Deal offers him a 55p an hour rise in two years' time. Meanwhile, many of the junior doctors working over the festive break will be luxuriating in £4 an hour for overtime.

Merry Christmas!

M.D.

Down on the Farm

THE Great Crisis has lasted for nearly three years now. It kicked off with the Beef Crisis in March 1996; evolved into the Hill-farming Crisis by autumn 1997; and became the full-blown Farming Crisis affecting every sector during 1998.

Industry leaders have grown hoarse with their cries for help, and from the beginning commentators have been predicting bankruptcy, widespread collapse and upland and lowland abandoned and derelict.

None of this shows any sign of happening. Land prices actually rose in 1999 and are little off their all-time high in 1997. Moreover, there is an acute shortage of farms on the market — less than for many years. Rents on farm business tenancies — which reflect the open market demand for the use of land — have not fallen at all and average a remarkable £125/acre for arable and £60/acre for grassland. Demand for both suckler cow and sheep quota has been strong, *while* milk quota values defy belief. Bankruptcy, except among pig producers, is as rare as ever. Articles by land agents and quota agents are fraught with ill-concealed amazement and relief.

Land values have some excuse, propped up as they are by city money, development cash and the lunacy of rollover relief. But even at these prices farmers, wallets swollen by the fat years 1993-6, are still buying more than half the land sold.

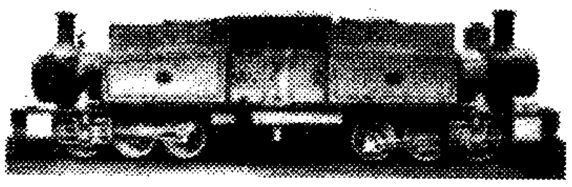
The same is true of rents and quota. These are the arable, dairy, beef and sheep sectors, whose accountants tell us are coming nowhere near break-even on production but are still prepared to pay huge upfront costs to produce even more — the sign of an industry whose sums, for many at least, still add up.

Farming accountancy, after all, is a creative art, and many farmers and landowners would be outraged if they and their accountants between them could not avoid showing a taxable profit: 25 percent of farms habitually make a loss; and even in the blindingly good year of 1995 these farms only just managed to crawl into the black. And while incomes really are now below the longterm average, a certain sleight-of-hand is the rule. In the zillions of recent references to falling incomes, not one has told the whole truth: that the crash is always measured from the pinnacle of the MacSharry Bonanza in 1995-6, when incomes had already tripled in the previous five years.

And if the figures are true, then we really have reached an absurd position. Total income in farming is now much less than total subsidy; half the subsidy is being used just to make up trading losses. So farmers have not yet learnt how to cover their costs even now when there is no need to do anything else; the habits of 40 years of high-cost farming are taking time to die. If they don't, the logical next stage would be a deal between government and farming to close down altogether and save money all round.

The crisis is real, but for some individuals rather than the industry as a whole. Those on the margin of viability, those trying to retire whose stock is devalued, others locked into high costs, and a few just downright unlucky. Claims that everyone is in the same boat are an insult to the small number of real tragedies.

'Gunboat'



SIGNAL FAILURES

TONY BLAIR would have seen how well his Third Way meshes with his social inclusion policies when he rode Manchester Metrolink's new tramline to Salford Quays as part of his crusade to show how well-off northerners are.

Trams on the £160m extension, funded chiefly by a private consortium of construction and engineering companies, call at a new station in Cornbrook which has *no* public access from the street or deprived local housing. However, yuppies from Salford Quays can change there to trams for prosperous Altrincham, or vice versa, without sharing platform space with riff-raff from beneath the viaducts. There are plans for access from the street, but only when some expensive flats are built nearby.

Still, the prime minister must have been impressed. A week after his ride, his deputy John Prescott (before the transport baton was snatched from him and given to Lord Gus Macdonald) indicated that the government had now changed its mind about light rail transit (high-quality trams) and that new LRT systems would feature in his 10-year transport plan as alternatives to cars.

It remains to be seen if they will be publicly funded to help tackle urban deprivation or privately funded and tailored only to the middle classes.

● THE *EYE* has obtained a fascinating comparison of wages on the privatised railway showing that Railtrack pays many signallers less than South West Trains (SWT) gives its cleaners.

There are two jobs at the vanguard of operational safety: driving and signalling. Both are supported by security devices, but the railway's safe running still depends on drivers and signallers of high calibre. Train drivers *are* well paid. Freightliner drivers receives £30,500 a year — almost treble the £10,978 Railtrack pays grade 1 signallers.

There are 10 grades of signaller and SWT depot cleaners get more than grade 5 signallers who work 43 hours a week, on average, for £15,027. The most senior signalling grade attracts a salary of £20,593 — about the same as an SWT ticket inspector.

However, not every job in Railtrack has been downgraded. Bob Horton earned £176,000 pa for three days' work a week before he stepped down as Railtrack chairman this year. Chief executive Gerald Corbett earned £409,000 last year, which made up for his being kicked out of Grand Metropolitan with a paltry handshake of £600,000. The salaries of Railtrack's executive directors have risen by 79.8 per cent since 1995.

● RAILTRACK's greed at the end of the 20th century could have unfortunate consequences for travellers through much of the 21st.

Birmingham New Street station, one of the worst bottlenecks on the rail system, is the hub of Virgin CrossCountry services. The snarl-up there has a knock on effect right across VCC's nationwide network (which has the worst punctuality record in Britain).

At the eastern end of the station there are just four tracks to handle masses of trains. But reconstruction of the Bull Ring shopping centre above the station now presents a golden opportunity for Railtrack to excavate space for another two tracks (or at least ensure the new centre's design would permit extra tracks in the future).

Railtrack would incur a small cost for keeping its options open but — surprise, surprise — it has decided four tracks will always be enough at the eastern end of the station even though a national 50 percent growth in train use is predicted and operators are already planning more services through Birmingham.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

LOCAL DEMOCKERY

A VITAL part of Saint Tony's vision for the new century is the revitalisation of local democracy.

Under the local government bill, likely to become law towards the end of 2000, directly elected mayors will bring, in the mantra of the modernisers, "openness, transparency, accountability and responsiveness" to local decision-making.

That's the theory. Alas, the bill gives councils a choice and — guess what — nearly all have already opted for a "reform" package that will... keep things just the way they are.

All but a handful of Britain's 400-odd local authorities, irrespective of political affiliation, appear likely to adopt the alternative "leader and cabinet" system. Small groups of senior councillors will meet in secret to make decisions, hiding publicly behind the mask of collective responsibility to avoid explaining or justifying what they do. Much like the present set up, in fact, only more secretive.

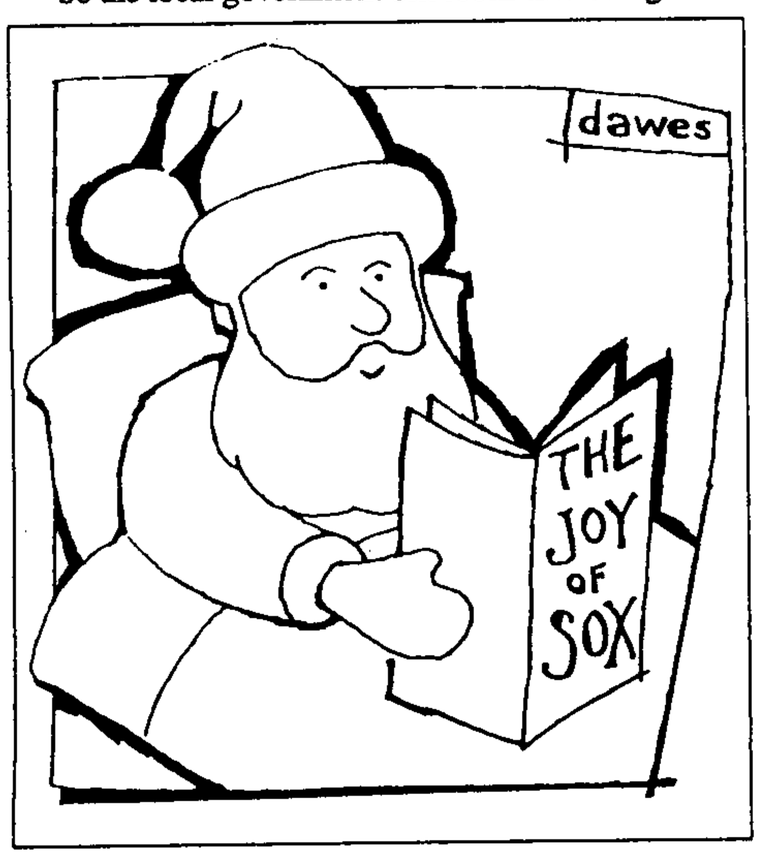
Grim bastions of Labour fixery such as **Glasgow**, **Doncaster** and **Middlesbrough** have leapt at the chance to keep power in the hands of a cabal; so have Tory councils such as **Kent** and **Bedfordshire**. The horror that councillors have of direct democracy was illustrated in Lib Dem-controlled **Liverpool**, where councillors voted 36-25 at the end of November to reject the mayoral system recommended by the Liverpool democracy commission. A further vote on whether to put the matter to a referendum went 49-18 against (many of the councillors in favour of a mayor recoiled at putting the decision in the hands of the voters!)

In Labour-controlled **Brighton and Hove**, the fiefdom until recently of former squatters' leader turned arch-moderniser Lord "Steve" Bassam, it was seen as a foregone conclusion that the Tony's Crony factor would ensure a mayoral system was adopted — but councillors voted for a cabinet.

Why do councillors hate the idea of mayors so much? Through the group system, they can at least influence the leader and, by toadying, be rewarded with committee chairmanships and other positions that attract handsome allowances. None of this applies — in theory, anyway — with a mayor in charge.

The London mayoral race may have turned into a fiasco because of the major parties' incompetence in selecting candidates, but at least it has shown that a dodgy contender will not long survive intensive media scrutiny.

So the local government bill looks like being a lost opportunity to make council politics relevant, transparent and all those other Blairy buzzwords. Councils will stay as they are, controlled by secret party group meetings, with the public not knowing, and largely not caring, what goes on until another town hall scandal story breaks. The only hope for those who want real change is that the bill provides for a compulsory referendum if 5 percent of the local population petitions for it. Failing that, the famous "forces of conservatism" will continue to rule the roost in our town halls.



● **FRANCIS WILLIAMS, the West Lancashire Labour party auditor who was rewarded for his diligence in raising serious questions about irregularities in the handling of the local party's finances (Eyes passim) by being barred from the list of candidates for West Lancashire district council, naturally appealed against this injustice. At his appeal hearing he found the panel to be heavily weighted with supporters of Frank McKenna, the West Lancs councillor and deputy leader of Lancashire county council, who had been the subject of criticism in his report. Furthermore, the Labour party's self-appointed acting northwest regional secretary, Peter Killeen, a friend of McKenna's, was presiding. Williams protested that he was unwilling to go ahead with the appeal in Killeen's presence, and wanted it reconvened with a more neutral official in charge. He was asked to leave, and assumed his request had been accepted. To his astonishment, the panel "heard" the appeal in his absence — minus any evidence from him — and turned it down.**

SISTERLY SOAP

LABOUR-RUN **Bradford** council is touchy about a newsletter circulated by disenchanted staff (there is no official whistleblowing policy), which alleges that the council "is riddled with favouritism and victimisation of dissenting voices".

Featured prominently in the newsletter is a tale, starring Janice Thornton, sister of leading Islington Blairite Baroness Thornton, worthy of a TV soap opera.

The saga began when Cllr Ralph Berry was ejected from the family home by his wife Caroline. Janice Thornton provided Berry with a roof over his head while he continued to enjoy a close liaison with Janice's other sister, Cllr Gillian Whitfield. Soon afterwards Janice was appointed co-ordinator of the Bradford north area panel, at a salary of around £30,000 a year, which reports to the chair of the community development committee, who happens to be, er, Ralph Berry. Janice's predecessor in the job, by the way, was one Tim Whitfield, husband of Gillian.

More in hope than expectation, Bradford's chief executive Ian Stewart has called on those responsible for the whistleblowing leaflet to come forward in "strictest confidence". Given the state of play in Bradford, that is like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas.

KICKED IN THE PRIVATES

THE new year is looking less rosy for those private firms that have made a lot of money in recent years from contracts to run local authority housing benefit (HB) departments.

After EDS lost its contract with **Wandsworth** last year, **Kingston-upon-Thames** also decided to give the firm the boot following a series of cock-ups (see *Eyes passim*). The contract, worth £1.5m annually, is, as in the case of Wandsworth, likely to go back in-house. In **Brent** a pregnant woman was recently awarded £1,000 after EDS delayed her housing benefit claim for 10 months, so that she built up £6,000 in rent arrears and was threatened with eviction by her landlord. In October EDS wrongly issued nearly 6,000 summonses to residents over alleged rent arrears. EDS's contract with Brent expires in 2003.

Still deep in despair are those who rely on computer firm CSL to process their claims in **Southwark** and **Croydon**. In Southwark CSL has been warned it faces a similar fate to EDS in Kingston unless a review, to be completed by April, finds significant improvements. Currently fewer than 3 percent of private sector claims are processed within statutory time limits, and only 25 percent of those for council or housing association tenants. Southwark has a backlog of more than 8,000 unprocessed HB claims in all. Croydon also has a thousands-strong queue. Croydon's council tax section, also run by CSL, has been under fire because of its apparent inability to send out correct council tax bills.

Two months ago **Broxbourne** council terminated *Eye* favourite Capita's contract for "poor performance". Even in **Lambeth**, where departing chief executive Heather Rabbatts has been a keen supporter of Crapita, serious consideration is being given to taking the contract back in-house.

NICE WORK

WHAT is it with these computer firms? In Labour-controlled **Haringey** the council is hurling cash at incompetent computer supplier ICL at the same time as it is hammering the wages and conditions of its own staff.

Manual workers are taking a pay cut of £495 a year, overtime is being slashed, staff will no longer be paid for the first two days of sick leave and maternity leave has been halved, etc, etc, provoking votes in favour of industrial action from town hall unions.

Meanwhile a memo leaked to the *Eye* reveals incredible charges for ICL staff: a manager costs £564 a day, a senior technician £485 per day (£65 per hour) and a humble technician costs £324 per day. So while Haringey cuts the wages of its cleaners, it is hiring computer technicians at the equivalent of £80,000 a year to ensure its systems are Y2K compliant.

ICL's latest cock-up involves a decision to speed up the "roll-out" of operating system Windows NT on 3,000 town hall desks from two years to six months. The authority admits this is causing "short term pain" — something of an understatement, with systems crashing and terminals freezing all round.

Not that ICL is feeling any of the pain. The leaked memo reveals that the firm will charge £90 for the following service: "Install standalone PC: Obtaining equipment from Storeperson, unboxing of CPU, VDU, KB and Mouse and Local Printer and placed on desk, connected together, cable management, connection to power supply £90". In other words — open the box, take the machine out, tidy the cables and plug it in.

● **THE festive fun continues in the charming cathedral city of Durham.**

Tabloid hacks — who followed up the sudden departure of head of recreation services Keith Walton (*Eye* 991) after videos of a senior council officer starring in "sexy romps" with female staff in council offices were found in his locker — were intrigued to hear of the existence of a certain photograph.

It apparently shows a prominent female Durham resident romping in a jacuzzi with yet another senior male council officer. Then the *Eye*'s phones began to buzz with tales of further photographs of the same officer making a splash with "two ladies from the housing department". What an extraordinary place!

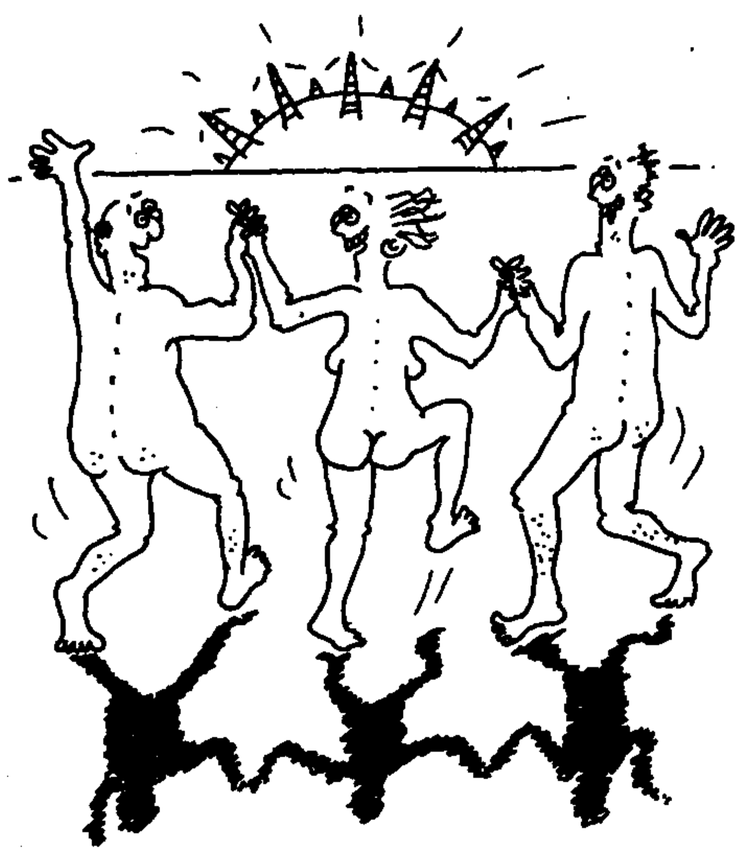
MILLENNIUM BALLS

● "A dog that uses a cashpoint, shops in a supermarket and buys Lottery tickets for a disabled Gulf War veteran has been named Dog of the Millennium today… Endel [a labrador] was chosen from 3,000 entrants by novelist Jilly Cooper in a competition run by *Dogs Today* magazine." — London *Evening Standard*.

○ "Singing star Ronan Keating has been voted the International Face of the Millennium. He came joint first with American chat-show queen Oprah Winfrey. Stunning singer Andrea Corr, the Corrs' vocalist, shared second place with Latino pop star Ricky Martin and basketball legend Michael Jordan, followed by US President Bill Clinton in third. Delegates from 43 countries were invited to nominate their favourite millennium faces." — *Mirror*.

● "Registered trademarks for 272 goods or services bearing the word millennium — or, in 21 cases, the misspelled 'millenium' — have been granted by the US Patent and Trademark Office." — *Kansas City Star*.

○ "Tommy Cooper has emerged as the Dome's Comedian of the Millennium and his trademark fez will top a three-dimensional brain in the Body Zone. Cooper, who died in 1984, was picked ahead of a number of comics — including Eric Morecambe, Arthur Askey, Billy Connolly and Eddie Izzard." — *Daily Telegraph*.



● "Are you ready for the party of the century? Chances are, as we enter the 21st century you aren't going to be able to stand up, let alone speak! So let Funmail, the irreverent free email service, do the speaking for you. Funmail is releasing a special collection of 250 Millennium email addresses to mark the big occasion. Get an email address which allow you to brag to your mates about your pulling power and let them know you went home with a yourname@millenniumbabe.co.uk or complain about your hangover with yourname@millenniumhangover.co.uk or yourname@millenniumpartiedout.co.uk… Other millennium-themed addresses to use to email everyone you know include: yourname@thrillennium.co.uk and yourname@madforthemillennium.co.uk and yourname@millenniumbuggered.co.uk. Graham Goodkind, one of the founders of Funmail, said: 'Funmail is the only email service which allows you to express exactly how you feel about the millennium. We expect many of these addresses to become collectors' items to mark this momentous occasion'." — Press release from Talk Loud PR of London.

○ "Working on this issue has afforded me the unique opportunity to explore issues not often discussed, to share my thoughts and curiosities on everything from Africa to zygotes, experience the power of intuition at work, discover the strength of community and witness the inner beauty of those who generously gave their hand in support. I hope that we have inspired you with a sense of empowerment that will allow you to move into this new millennium with the passion and courage to embrace your life and those around you." — DEMI MOORE (reflecting on her guest editorship of an issue of the US *Marie Claire*).

● "DY2KE — the only girls' party for the millennium in the West End." — poster in the window of the Candy Bar, Soho's top lesbian nightspot.

○ "*Secret Chamber* and the remarkable events due to take place at midnight on 31 December 1999 in Egypt will mean our perception of life may never be the same again. *Secret Chamber* will reveal the answers to the following and much more:

Is there a secret chamber in the Great Pyramid or a Hall of Records under the Sphinx of Giza that await discovery? Will they ever be opened?

What is the connection between the star Sirius and the gilded capstone that will be placed on the Great Pyramid at midnight on the 31 December 1999?

What binds the Star of Bethlehem with this gilded capstone? How does it link up with the cities of Paris and Washington DC and the New World Order of Freemasons?" — Kelly Todd, Century Books Publicity.

● "Amazon.com's Millennium Poll tracked more than 250,000 users' picks for the best 100 books, movies and albums from the past 1,000 years. Not surprisingly, the books list comprises customary favourites like *Ulysses*, *Hamlet* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. But it also contains a number of current front list favourites, including *Have a Nice Day*, the biography of professional wrestler Mankind, as the 76th best book of the millennium. — *Book Publishing Report* (US).

○ "Millennium Media Presents… Y2Kaos™. One stop shop for Y2K & Millennium t-shirts, novelties & gifts from around the US. When your children or grandchildren ask you about Y2K, WILL YOU HAVE VISUALS? Order them now or kick yourself when it's too LATE!!!" — Website home-page for Y2Kaos™.

● "Not only is Robbie Williams more important than Mozart, but Michael Jackson is one of the top three most influential musicians of the past 1,000 years according to the results of the HMV, Channel 4 and Clasic FM poll of Music of the Millennium… The poll of 600,000 people in the UK placed Elvis and Madonna at the top of the Best Male and Female Singer categories, with John Lennon claiming the top dog category as Most Influential Musician." — *New Musical Express*.

That Most Influential Musician of the Millennium list in full:

1. John Lennon
2. Elvis Presley
3. Michael Jackson
4. Jimi Hendrix
5. Sir Paul McCartney
6. Robbie Williams
7. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
8. David Bowie
9. Bob Dylan
10. Johann Sebastian Bach

○ "The teddy bear was named yesterday as… the toy of the millennium. The cuddly teddy easily won the battle of the toy chest, topping our phone poll with a massive 53 per cent of the vote." — *Mirror*.

"Put the 'Toy of the Millennium' Under the Tree With a Little Help From LEGOLAND®. Noted toy experts and analysts have commended products from each stage of the LEGO® System of Play this holiday season… Listeners of a Top 20 radio station in San Diego went a step further, voting the LEGO® brick 'the Top toy of the Millennium'." — Press release from, er, LEGOLAND®.

● "MISSION 2000 AT ESSEX COUNTY HALL. As of 1 October 1999 the objectives of the mission will start to unravel. Promotions, special offers and competitions will start to disclose the final plan… Be sure you don't miss out. You do not want to be the last to know!!! The mission date is set for January 2000 when all will be revealed." — Leaflet from Sutcliffe Catering (UK) Ltd announcing its plans for the staff canteen at Essex county council under the title: "A New Millennium, A New Restaurant."

○ "Like everyone else at millennium's end, I keep thinking of how it all began in Europe. Does a day pass that one does not give at least a fleeting thought to the Emperor Otto III and to Pope Sylvester II? I should highly doubt it." — Gore Vidal, *New York Review of Books*.

BLASPHEMY SHOCK

POLICE 5

AT LAST a happy ending to the amazing story of the man who was convicted of biting a policeman with someone else's teeth.

Older *Eye* readers may recall how pupil barrister Alistair Mitchell was arrested at a poll tax demonstration in 1990 and accused of assaulting PC Geoffrey Judd. PC Judd swore on oath that Mr Mitchell had bitten him on the hand.

Mitchell was duly convicted by the stipendiary magistrate at Marlborough Street and was sent to prison for 44 days. He appealed to Southwark crown court. Before the case was heard, the bite mark on PC Judd's hand was submitted for scientific examination. Two top dental experts explained to the judge, who was sitting with lay magistrates, that the bite mark could not possibly have been caused by Alistair Mitchell's teeth.

Judge Anwyl-Davies, better known to defendants in south London as Animal Davies, was unimpressed. In a novel interpretation of the independence of the judiciary he announced: "I am not deceived by the experts." The judge appeared to spend a lot of the case reading a book and did not even consult the magistrates he was sitting with before dismissing the appeal.

Mr Mitchell applied for judicial review, which was granted. In 1993, Messrs Justice Kennedy and Buckley quashed the conviction. In all Mr Mitchell spent 13 days in prison, while PC Judd applied for early retirement and went to South Africa. The latest good news is that nearly 10 years after the alleged offence, Mr Mitchell has accepted £40,000 offered him by the Metropolitan police to settle his claim for assault and false imprisonment.

ON HIS appointment as the Met police commissioner in 1993, Sir Paul Condon told the force newsletter *The Job* that he welcomed "league tables" for policing.

"We have nothing to fear from comparisons made with other parts of the police service nationally, and comparisons within the Met will help us to become more efficient."

Sir Paul must have been disappointed when the first home office league table comparing the performance of all 43 police forces in England and Wales in fighting crime finally appeared last month… and the Met was ranked 33.

SUSSEX police got a lot of publicity in November for Operation Spoil – a brilliant wheeze by which officers sat in their cars doing paperwork outside the homes of known villains.

The idea was to harass the crooks and disrupt the routines of drug-dealers and burglars. It had them "ballistic with rage", said a police spokesman.

The local *Brighton Argus* ran an exclusive but intriguing photo of an officer "getting on with her paperwork – and preventing crime at the same time". It was intriguing because the crime den outside which the car was parked was clearly identifiable to those in the know as Malling House in Lewes – HQ of Sussex police!

Letters

Private Eye

The Last Word On Hong Kong

Sir,

In reference to your recent letter from my friend Nury Vittachi, I would like to defend Jonathan Fenby. While it is true that in 1997 I said that my favourite part of the SCMP [South China Morning Post] was the bridge column this was in half jest. During his period, the efforts of Mr Fenby, editor of the SCMP, in defending press freedom in Hong Kong were energetic, sincere and by and large successful. Press freedom in Hong Kong needs all the friends it can muster, as I am sure Messrs Vittachi and Fenby will agree.

Sincerely,
MARTIN LEE,

Hong Kong.

Fair play

Sir,

I write with reference to an article (12 Nov) concerning a complaint made against one of our member groups by a parent.

There were several misleading and untrue facts in the article. Firstly, I have never insisted that the tethering allegation was unfounded as your magazine stated. The staff admitted they used the bedsheets as an alternative to safety harnesses during lunchtime. What has been denied is that the children or the chairs were then tied to a table. No evidence has been found to support the allegation that the children were tied to a table.

Secondly, Carol Griffiths has never been employed by a WPPA. She was employed by a member playgroup of our association as a part-time playleader. Carol Griffiths was not sacked either by WPPA or by St Mark's Playgroup. She left the playgroup without giving notice when she realised she did not work enough hours to qualify for family credit.

I wish to register my concern that this article was printed without the facts being substantiated as it could prove to be very damaging to our association and our member groups. Had your journalists taken the time to contact us, we could have informed them of the true facts. As you are aware, as a small local charity, we do not have the finances available to redress the damage caused by misleading articles in the press.

Yours faithfully,
JEAN CROWLEY,

Head of Childcare & Education, Wandsworth Primary Play Association (WPPA).

Hungry for change

Sir,

Re: Rotten Boroughs — Starvation 1999. Strange that Mrs Hardy's family [who intend to take legal action against Lambeth council over her death] didn't notice her weight loss!

Yours faithfully,
DAVID WILKINSON,

Warrington, Cheshire.

Good Knight from him

Sir,

I was obviously totally distraught to learn of my supposed demotion from "Labour's local government supremo" (Eye 990) to "Labour's local government enforcer" (Eye 991).

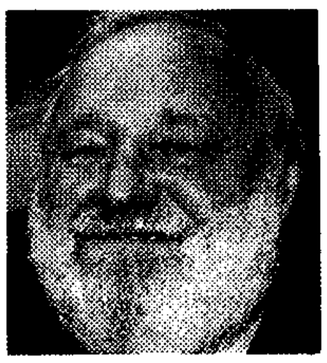
However, this rumour appears to be based on the assertion that two potential local candidates have "been reinstated on (my) orders" (Eye 991). As there is absolutely no truth in this statement - I neither have the power to so order, nor have I been involved in any way in these appeals to an independent regional appeals' panel - I am treating my demotion as a malicious rumour as well.

Democratically yours,
HOWARD KNIGHT,

Head, Local Government Unit, The Labour Party.

Lookalike

Dobson



Father Christmas

Sir,

Lucky Londoners! The possible new mayor bears a remarkable similarity to Raymond Briggs's Father Christmas. Let us hope they have much in common.

Yours etc,
ENA B. RUSHTON,

London SW6.

The first casualty...

Sir,

Trust the Guardian to put things right wrongly! Germany declared war on the United States, not the other way round!

DEREK J. COLE,

Via e-mail.

Un pédant écrit...

Messieurs,

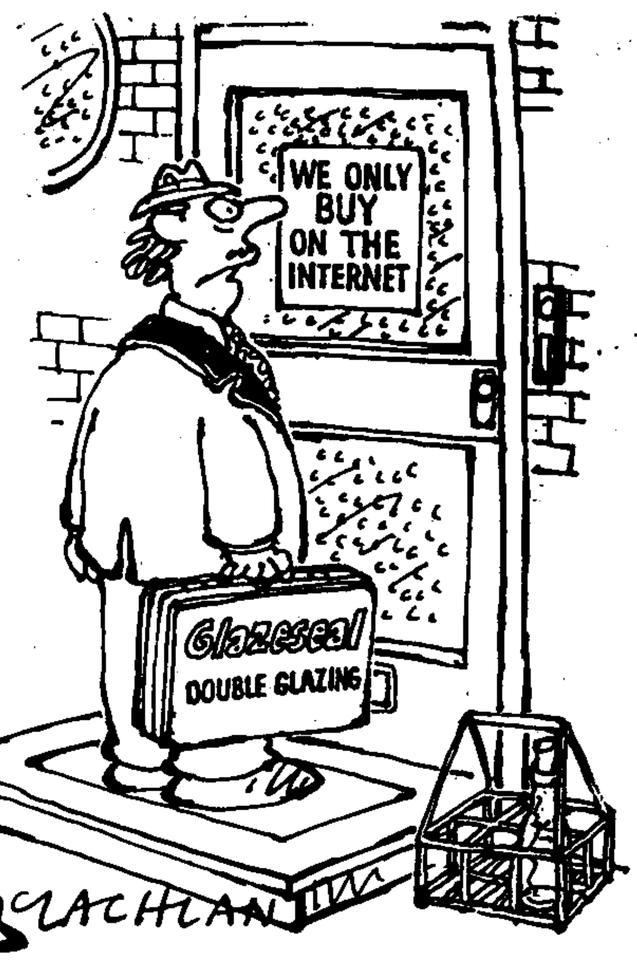
Sorry to go on about this but your correspondents are wrong about both butchery and sheep.

Nouveau/nouvelle can precede or follow nouns; nouvelle boucherie seems right here. I won't bore you with all the complication: I am only allowed to do this when at work. Or if you send me some Beaujolais Nouveau.

Moutiers has nothing alas to do with sheep but just means "church". What the "mauxfaits" were I have no idea, but I don't recall any good cases of French clergymen misbehaving with sheep.

D.A. TROTTER,

Dept. of European Languages, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.



Sucking useless

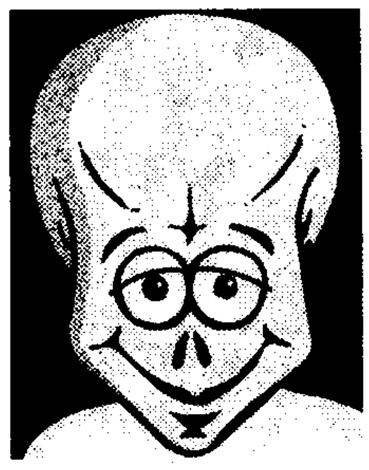
Sir,

Craig Brown's satire is good to read when it is aimed at the genuinely duplicitous, but the notion that the BBC's "MacIntyre Undercover" made a fuss out of nothing is wholly false. In some cases, perhaps, it may be said to have revealed what was already known, but it is one thing to know that something happens and another to watch it happen. The programmes were markedly courageous in spirit and dignified in approach. Brown's response was much less so. Next to the harrowing scenes from within a care home, the "boiled sweets" work looks unfortunate at best.

FRANK O'CONNOR,

Via e-mail.

Lookalike



Hague

Cartoon-like figure

Sir,

I couldn't but notice the striking resemblance between the suave and sophisticated young man that Planet Talk are currently using in their efforts to do down British Telecom and the absurd cartoon-like figure that the Conservative Party has recruited to raise a mathematically challenged V-sign to the Government.

Are they in any way related? I think we should be told!

Yours faithfully,
PETER DAVIES,

Suffolk.

Baaa-king mad

Sir,

Your cartoonist Tony Husband seems to have a problem drawing sheep (Eye 990). They resemble Arsenal supporters in duffel coats.

Enclosed photo of one of my favourites called Angela. Would this be of any help?

Yours,
G.P. NEVELL,

Shetland.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

ANY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS DARLING?
YES... I'M GONNA GIVE UP THIS DISGUSTING HABIT!
COUGH!
I HAVE 60 A DAY YOU KNOW!
MY GOD THAT'S OBSCENE!!!
COUGH COUGH COUGH
I KNOW..... IF I CAN GET IT DOWN TO ABOUT 5 CALORIES A DAY I'LL FEEL A LOT BETTER!
JUST DON'T ORDER TOMATOES WITH YOUR SALAD
COUGH COUGH COUGH

Girl trouble

Sir,

What relevance does the sex of a young, non-English speaking European vet have to the uselessness or otherwise of his/her work (Even Newer Muckspreader, Eye 991)? Could it possibly be the same as that of the sex of a chauvinistic, arrogant git of a journalist to the ill-informed assumptions of his writing?

You really aren't improving the image of farming you know.

Yours subscriptionfully,
DR A.L. SULLIVAN,

Sir,

Although being young and having a poor command of English might be a handicap to being an "official veterinary surgeon" in a meat plant, I am at a loss as to why Even Newer Muckspreader thinks that the absence of bollocks should pose the same problem (Down on the Farm, 10 December).

Yours faithfully,
GODRIC JOLLIFFE,

London SW17.

Toad haul

Sir,

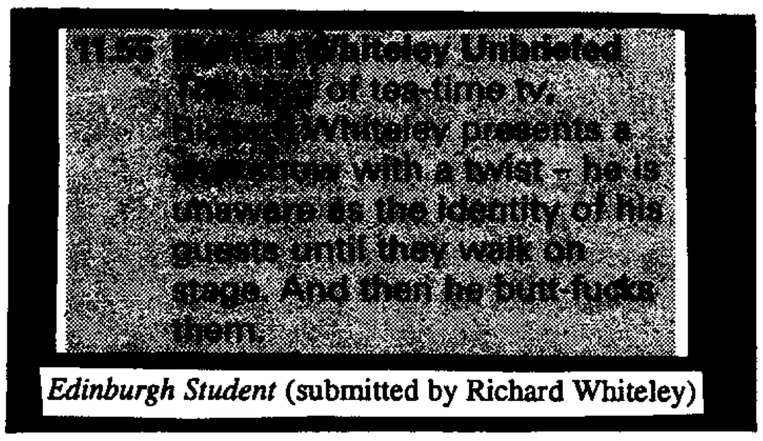
Following your article on Christina Hamilton and Peter Brookes' Nature Notes; imagine my delight on purchasing a copy earlier today, just off Oxford Street to find the first species depicted is none other than the Giant Toad (hamiltonius corruptus). Further pleasure was to be found page 23 in the satirical sharpness of the Vixen (hamiltona brownenvelopa). I did not count the copies but there must have been a good dozen on sale.

I hope more of the public get to them before the Toad or the Vixen does!

After all, Oxford Street is not that far from the Strand.

ALASTAIR MACQUEEN,

Via e-mail.



Edinburgh Student (submitted by Richard Whiteley)

"Wow! That was some parents' evening"

Table Dancer

Just a Minet...

Sir,

I am writing to correct what is, I hope, a mistake by Slicker in your In the City page concerning an article about Ronnie Driver.

In the second paragraph, the article states "his chums included such pin-striped swindlers as Peter Cameron-Webb and John Wallrock of Minet Infamy".

The two swindlers involved in Minet were Peter Cameron-Webb and Peter Dixon. Millions of pounds were traced to them but they fled the jurisdiction.
I was the subject of proceedings in that matter, under the law of agency, but it was never at any time suggested that I had committed fraud, swindled or had acted like a crook.
I hope it will be helpful if you read the enclosed letter from Clifford Turner to my solicitors, Messrs Cameron Markby, who make it clear that no allegations of fraud were made against me. Mr Justice Scott also confirmed this when approving the settlement in this action.
I am 77 years of age now and do not wish to go to my grave with the reputation as a "swindler".

Yours sincerely,
JOHN WALLROCK,

London SW1.

● ***Slicker responds: What about, instead, a reputation as a liar who was grossly dishonest and guilty of unacceptable conduct? That, after all, was the verdict of two department of trade and industry reports on John Wallrock who, by the time they were published, had already been expelled by Lloyd's for misconduct.***

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"My descendants originate from Scotland."
MEL C. (Sporty Spice)
(Adam Irvine)

"We are now entering a new Millennium and football's a completely different cup of tea."
DAVE BASSET, Sky Sports
(Phil Reilly)

"He's like all great players... he's not a great player yet."
TREVOR FRANCIS, Radio 4
(M.J. Crawford)

"I couldn't really jet off to the States on a whim and a prayer."
DAVID PLATT, Radio Five Live.
(Andy Macleod))

Caller: *We are celebrating our New Year today: it's called Diwali.*
Chris Yeo: *Wow! You get to celebrate the Millennium early!*
Capital Gold
(Ian Heath)

Moss gathering

Sir,

If the man looking over Snipcock's shoulder in Eye 991 is supposed to be John Walsh, then I'm glad to hear that at least some things remain unchanged in the UK. As a London bookshop manager in the mid-80s I attended several thousand similar literary gatherings and John had a running joke which went something like: "All right, folks, Hugo Moss is the most important person left in here, the party's over." And so to the pub...

HUGO MOSS,

Rio de Janeiro.

Flavours Manager
Buckinghamshire
Senior position with a major flavour house. Savoury background required. Ref: IFD8639

Food recruitment opportunities

Chile con carnage

Sir,

Now with the Tory campaign for mayor of London in some disarray after Lord Archer's downfall, I wondered if Senator Pinochet, who appears these days to be a permanent Surrey resident, might not be prevailed upon to stand as the Tory candidate? He enjoys the full confidence of Baroness Thatcher but is, I believe, unable to speak English, surely a fairly elementary requirement for being lord mayor? However, full translation services could be provided I am sure, and if elected, Senator Pinochet could promise us the mass execution of his political opponents in Wembley Stadium.

I remain, Sir, your most humble and obedient servant,
JOHN FITTON,

Greenford, Middlesex.

Aggronyms

Sir,

*Re: Carlton United Newspapers & Television. I fear you've been urban mythed! I remember the same story doing the rounds when Newcastle Poly was seeking to rechristen itself as a University. City University of Newcastle upon Tyne was unfortunately rejected — my informant assured me that this was only **after** 000s of pounds of stationery had been commissioned and produced.*

Likewise we regrettably never saw the launch of Tyne Wear And Tees Television, which was also mooted so I was reliably informed.

Cheers,
MIKE SEYMOUR,

Bonn, Germany.

Lookalike

Atkinson

Gorky

Sir,

These two pictures — of Rowan Atkinson and Arshile Gorky — make me wonder if the two are not pseudonyms of the same man.

Yours faithfully,
BOB STONE,

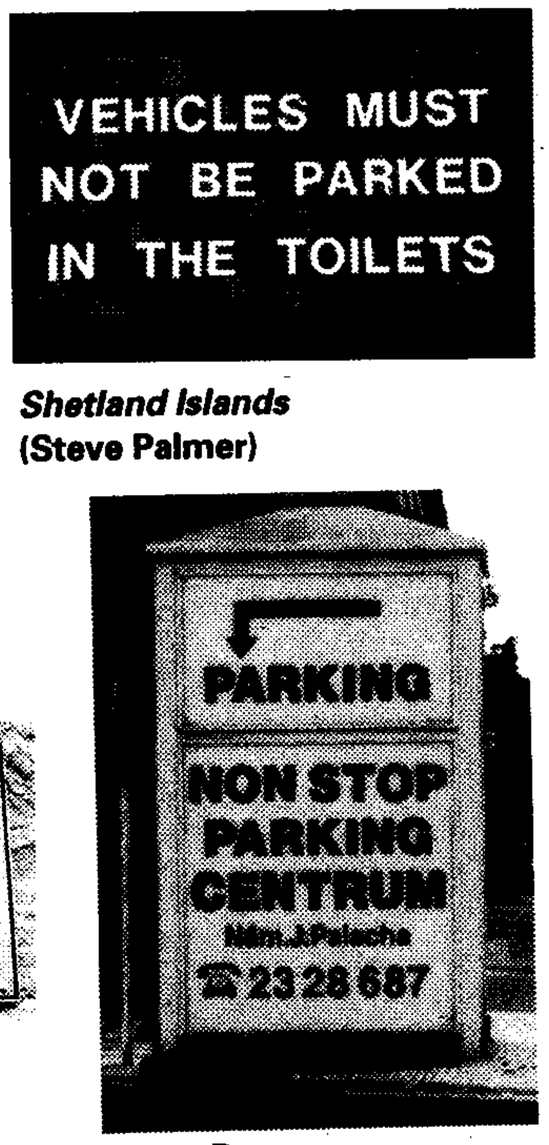
Worcester.

I-SPY CAR PARK CORNER

Salcombe
(Dr J. Jenkins)

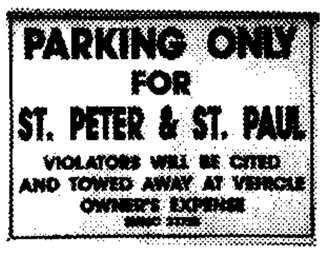
PARKING FOR RIVERSIDE RESTAURANT USERS SOLELY
(BETWEEN 6.30 & 11.00)
Unauthorized Parking Liable to a £200 per Hour Fine
PARKING IS AT OWNERS RISK

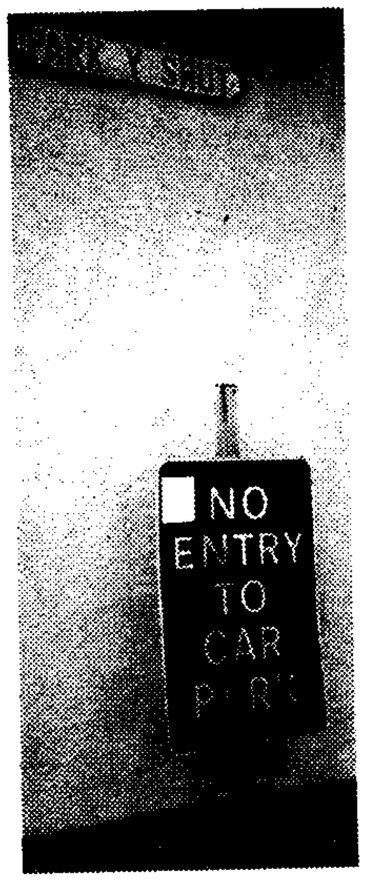
Cheddar
(William Stewart)



Shetland Islands
(Steve Palmer)

Prague
(Chris Wigram)





Fishguard
(Colin Doubleday)

Wallsend
(Michael Doolan)

Santa Monica, California
(Michael Jago)

£10 paid for similar submissions *(SAE required for return of photograph. No transparencies.)*

Modus very handy

Sir,

The inability of our friends Prescott and Blair to make a decision on the Dalton Flats project is not as clear cut as your organ stated. As a Peterlee resident I feel I can justly comment on this. The same leisure/shopping centre has been proposed as redevelopment of the existing run down centre of Peterlee (only five miles from Seaham). Modus developments, the current owner of Peterlee, have invested in attracting large "brand" name organisations to the town, partially covered the shopping precinct which must surely rate as the windiest in Britain, also instead of building on a brown field site Peterlee currently has seven retail outlets looking for tenants, large swathes of land within the centre of town screaming for the self-same development. The Modus proposal offered a new leisure centre, multi-screen cinema complex, new police station, new fire station, new Law Court, all this has been temporarily put on hold pending the outcome of the Dalton Flats application.

Keep up the bad work.
JOHN,

Via e-mail.

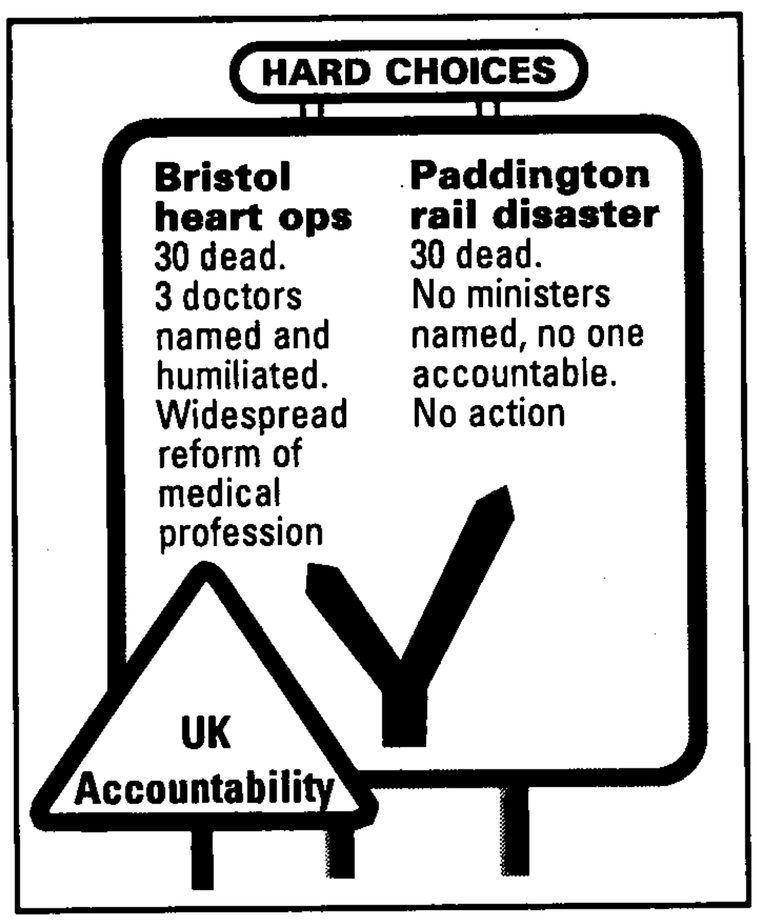
Perfidious Albion

Sir,

It came as somewhat less than a surprise when I discovered that an anagram of "St Albion Parish News" is: "Pointless brainwash". Is Alastair Campbell the Editor, by any chance? I think we should be told...

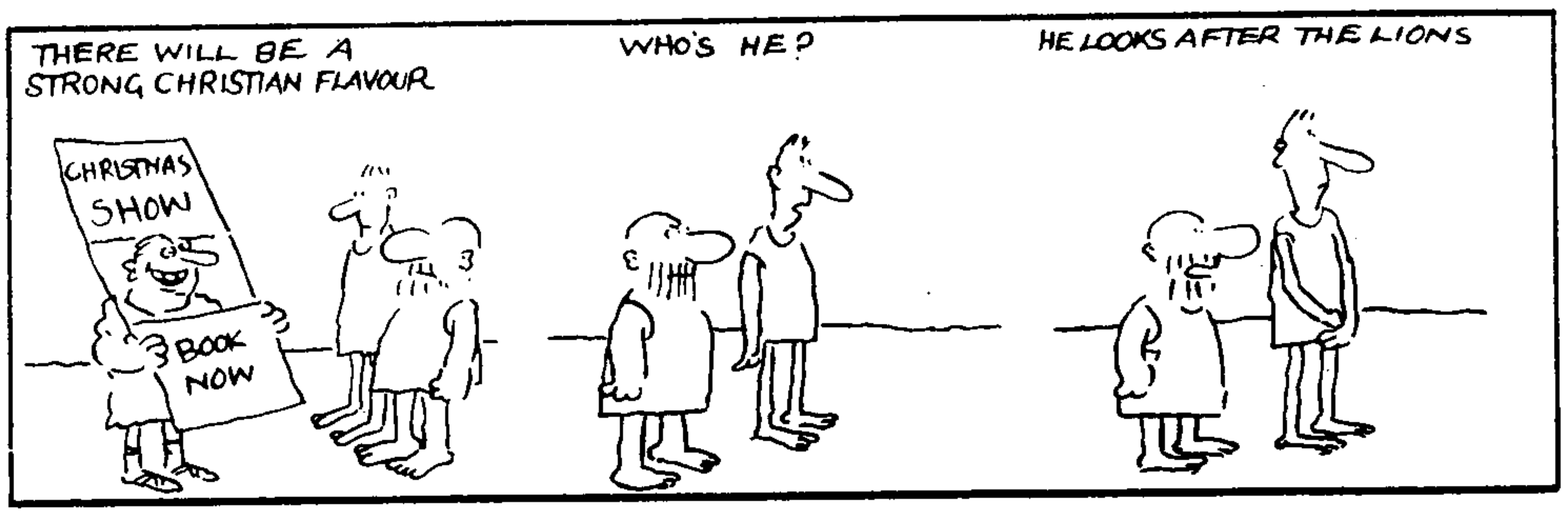
Yours,
MICK TULLY,

Via e-mail.



HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Pseuds Corner

Saturday May 26: When I rang to speak to Margaret I was again and again asked to hold on. When she got to the telephone she said, "I was in the garden giving my grandson a glass of orange juice." The public has not the slightest idea of what a vulnerable, human woman she is.

WOODROW WYATT
(Diaries volume II)

Poor old England. Another new start, another tale of woe in quadruplicate. I have been poorly, but already I am getting better. England's symptoms are far more worrying. The sick man of cricket is tossing on his bed, and no Lemsip will bring him any ease.

There is a passage in Proust in which the sick man spends an eternity tossing and fretting on his bed. But he opens his eyes to see light beneath the door: joy! Night has almost gone, day is coming, soon the servants will arrive with breakfast and good cheer. And then, in an eye-blink, the light is gone. It was not the light of day but the light of a lamp, now extinguished as the evening ends, leaving the sad patient with no hope, only a night of darkness and sickness. Will it ever end?

SIMON BARNES
The Times

My family are all artistic, so when it comes to Christmas there is fierce competition between us. It is not so much in the gifts we give, but in the way they are packaged. One year my sister Sandy made labels for every gift with a different Inuit word for snow written on each one.

VICTORIA SUFFIELD
The Times Magazine

The Geri [Halliwell] web site reflects the two facets of the Geri image – Holy versus the Dangerous Geri – portrayed by her album Schizophonic. The Geri web site is an extension of Geri's personality; strong, clever and fun! With an interface that is brave and challenging, as is Geri...

Press release

Stealth Wealth has codes of behaviour. The fabulously successful author Robert Harris, so painfully admired by journalists, does not have a flashy fibre in

his being. His life is centred on his family. They enjoy simply pastimes such as bicycling. He has acquired the glow of health-stealth-wealth. The free-wheeling nature of the newly monied – youthful, multi-careered– allows a faintly Hideous Kinky approach to life.

SARAH SANDS
Daily Telegraph

CONTRIBUTORS: David Redway, Aditya Chakrabortty, Tony Duffy, Janet Hollinshead, Ros Taylor, L. Stock, C. Gordon.

£10 paid for entries

Wed 27th – 7.30 p.m.
Bat Droppings Workshop
By Dr. Roger Ramsome. An unforgettable, hands-on event for all levels including beginners.

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

● "Be warned. The end-of-year concert by Jean-Michel Jarre at Giza is just a diversion," cautioned Texe Marrs, as he gave details of the Spiritual Tour Operators' Millennium Trip to the Pyramids. "While he is playing his music, and shining his lasers over the desert, former president George Bush and other Freemasons will be inside the pyramids, summoning up Lucifer on the stroke of midnight, to perform Illuminati rituals of consummate evil."

Despite attempts by Egyptian officials to dissuade "pyramidiots" from visiting Giza on December 31st, Marrs, Arizona Wilder, David Icke, and other prophets of doom are all planning to be there, along with hundreds of pre-

millennial conspiracy theorists. "The giant image of the Pharaonic Eye of Horus will be projected onto the sides of the Giza pyramids, just like the glowing eye on the pyramid on a US dollar bill. Meanwhile, George Bush will be leading a black mass in the burial chamber deep inside the Cheops pyramid, to summon up oppressive evil forces. Bush and the British royal family are key members of the world Illuminati elite. They are human-reptile hybrids, whose rituals are designed to tap into fourth-dimensional energy forces and deprive ordinary mortals of their consciousness, and they plan to usher in the Age of Horus. And if you need further proof of the truth of what I am predicting, then listen to what David Icke has to say." *(The Sentinel [Arizona], 15/11/99. Spotter: Philippe Chan)*

—●—

● "They were the most polite robbers I have ever met," Njaje Makanga, manager of the Mashreq Bank in Nairobi, told reporters. "The six men smiled when they came in, and their leader said, 'Please excuse us, we have come here to do a normal day's work, just like you, so let us both conduct business as normal and co-operate with each other.' Then they produced a gun, held it to my head, and asked if I would mind being tied up.

"I showed them where the keys to the safe were, and they asked me if I could possibly lie on top of my colleagues, who they had already tied up before I arrived. Everyone who came through the door received a personal apology as they were being taken hostage, and after an hour they had tied up twenty people, and we were all lying in a big heap together. Then they began counting their bullets, and told us 'if things go wrong, I'm afraid we'll only be able to kill ten of you, at the most, sorry about that' and suggested that we should all sing hymns. Their leader began by singing 'Abide With Me.' He had a good voice, and it was very moving.

"It took them three hours to empty out all the safes, and before they left they took all our jewellery too. But they kept apologising as they took off our rings and watches, and promised to post all items of sentimental value back to us. One of their number was tearful as he said his goodbyes. Before leaving, they invited us all to a party at a nearby bar on Friday night, where they said they were going to celebrate their new-found wealth, and left. It was more like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid than a proper robbery, but we were still quite scared." *(Zimbabwe Independent, 20/11/99. Spotter: Helen Jackson)*

—●—

● *"We regard Miss Cui Minye as an exemplary teacher," declared the headmaster of the village school in Huayi (in Shanxi Province, China) to a meeting of disgruntled parents. "It is true that she carved the word 'thief' on the cheek of a twelve-year-old pupil, but she had her reasons. The boy had stolen 10 yuan from a classmate, so Miss Cui decided to make an example of him. She took an awl and carved eleven strokes on his face, spelling out the word 'thief' across his cheek. Then she used red ink to make the word stand out clearly, and to stop the bleeding. We fully support her action, but she cannot answer her critics personally, because she is on a well-deserved holiday at a beach resort, as a reward from her colleagues, who have voted her the best teacher in the school."* (The Bangkok Post, 21/10/99. Spotter: Scott McDonald)

—●—

● "There was drama last week at the Chilanga supermarket in Lusaka," Masautso Chipako told readers of his On The Beat column in a Zambian newspaper, "involving the wife of a government minister, who is a well-known snob. I shall not name this

stuck-up person today, but she is a regular at the supermarket, and always gives the workers hell when she is there.

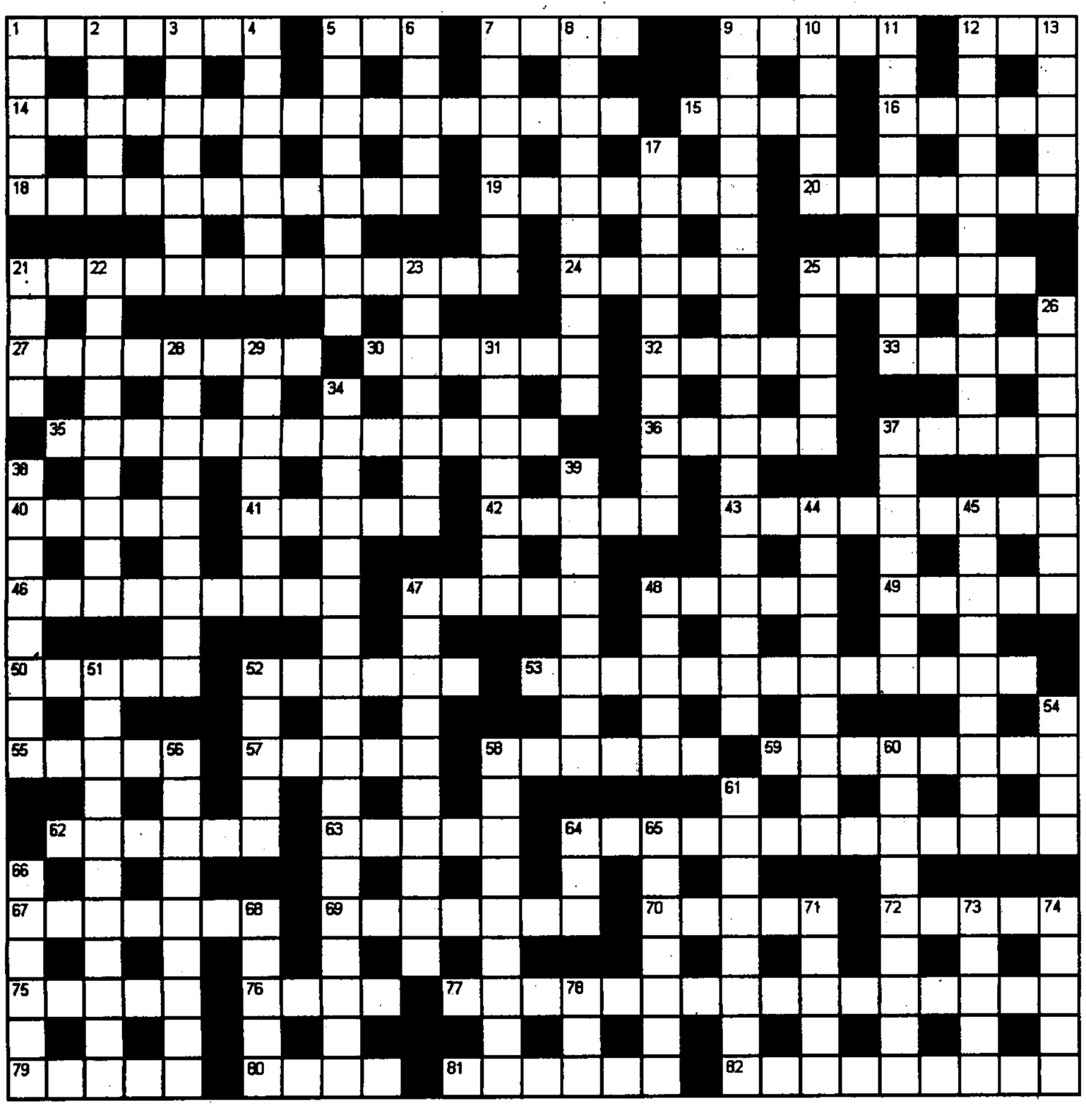
"On this day, she walked in and got a trolley-full of goods as usual. But as she reached the till and got out her money to pay, she suddenly started vomiting worms. All over the counter they went, hundreds of them. They poured out of her for several minutes, and caused quite a stir in the supermarket as shoppers and passers-by rushed in to see 'the wriggling snakes coming out of the snobby woman.' The supermarket had to close for a short time, to allow the workers to clean up the vomit and the worms, while the stuck-up woman watched in disgrace. When she had recovered, she explained to the staff that she had taken some deworming medicine earlier that day, but she did not help to clean up her worms. Typical haughty behaviour. In fact, if I hear any more complaints about her being a snob, I shall name her in this column." *(Sunday Times of Zambia, 28/2/99. Spotter: Mary Rose Tobin)*

EYE CROSSWORD 147

by Cyclops

£250 prize

'Some low points of the last thousand years'



ACROSS

1 Bowie appearing in Iowa shambles – heavy losses incurred here (3,4)
5/7 ac. Racism personified, Carter has ditched my bird (3,4)
7 (see 5 ac.)
9 Society takes Carling to be a sloppy mess (5)
12 Viewed as a non-stop diet of naff pop? (3)
14 Archer catching our monarch's eye its most memorable feature? (6,2,8)
15/52 dn. Fascists A-Z embraced by Ulster group (4,5)
16 Woman's second anus transplant (5)
18 Arbitrary court returns arseholes to cell (4,7)
19 Hopeless on job – figure they're rockers (3,4)
20 Discredited ex-PM, a sport it's said (7)
21 Provoked by Sarajevan events, premier has struggle containing sphere of interest (5,5,3)
24 Lord, what an unlikely candidate he was! (5)
25 (see 10)
27 Set to get a single from this dire station (5,3)
30 Half nuts, lyrically, this leader (6)
32 Wise, somewhat older Nietzsche (5)
33 Brenda has a book in her, set in London's suburbia (5)
35 Corrupter, mud stirring hard man in the rag business ... (6,7)
36 ... shoots puffs (5)
37 After Old, this had a poor electoral turnout (5)
40 Tart giving one to cops without resistance (5)
41 One has to remove unwanted hair, we hear, as a form of defence (5)
42 (see 55)
43 (see 68)
46 Message leaving its recipient gobsmacked? (9)
47 Newspapers mean to give away name (5)
48 (see 78)
49 Cardinal and bishop to sail off (5)
50 Money once from spreading dirt about one (5)
52 "Speed a factor in pilot error" piece (6)
53 Foreign balls-up, Tony's first blunder – bad time for 'enemies of the state' (5,2,6)
55/42 Labour transport scheme, cheap and nasty (5,5)
57 Pisses off IRA with empty news (5)
58 Ex-PM always ready with provisions? (6)
59 One's out of Cointreau, lost like Woody Allen (8)
62 Turn hideous when student takes interest – Fug off outside, youth! (6)
63 Sugar didn't agree with this manager in tabloid terms (2,3)
64 A stock complaint of Thatcher according to her detractors? Disorder (3,3,7)
67 Socially inept people's habits (7)
69 Fetching, topless and giving a buzz (7)
70 Free sex about in the morning – oral sort? (5)
72 Spaniard born in China with nothing on (5)
75 Fashionable to decline this familiar title? (5)
76 City once invaded by 15/52 corps – a major power no more (4)
77 'Unionists harshly treated,' mad Ulster MP told Yard (9,7)
79 Sod the world! (5)
80 Nazi game, chopping head off (4)
81 Take in crooked ex-minister (6)
82 Fall-guys of combative sport? (9)

DOWN

1 Long-range destroyers about in computers (5)
2 Sot pissed on Italian grade ruined port (5)
3 Dicky Chip, one time criminal (7)
4 Green party after a very old accountant (7)
5 A national symbol, Prescott? Bollocks! (4,4)
6 Top spy takes rise out of cheapskate (5)
7 As one approaching peak, Charles needs to loosen up (7)
8 Executive aids to reshape arse and groins (10)
9 National quiz team quite capable of stretching their opponents (7,11)
10/25ac/66 Temper on King Edward a severe deficiency – a blight on our past? (5,6,6)
11 The slut screwed between two terminals – on this? (2,7)
12 Pinochet supporter right in the paper next to the aforementioned pop singer (3,8)
13 Victory in New York for (one spelling of) hard player (5)
17 Crafty folk but the main refugees of the last decade (4,6)
21 Accident-prone leader's car (4)
22 Angry men barracked supporters of 47 dn. (3,6)
23 Flow-interrupter fixed to party's nutters! (7)
25 Mangle hacks! (5)
26 He made Charles go topless (8)
28 Excessively rough, the result of taking out more than you've put in (9)
29 Unbalanced brunette (3,4)
31 Found Blanchett being squeezed by old profligate (7)
34 Copper and Boycott bolt coming to climax, two worldly, powerful opponents on the brink (5,7,6)
37 'Rest of Sunday kissing Campbell's butt' – Brown (7)
38 Sunless, takes Times – not renowned for cultural advancement! (4,4)
39 Fergie less hot by Jove, touring war-torn city (8)
44 Colour separation process painter pointlessly had (9)
45/52dn. The dumping of Beveridge, it's said, by independent-minded citizens (6,3,5)
47 Boateng, no leader, must upset the leader (3,3-4)
48 Horny thing's obsession with the French (5)
51 Loyal paraders of fruit arrangement (6,5)
52 (see 15, also 45)
54 Good cocaine, speed and Ecstasy taken by many students (4)
56 Our Brenda sees Murdoch last in, second out (9)
58 Doomed 21 ac. venture causing Georgia pointless crude oil spill (9)
60 Stupid tosser, pro-Clinton opponent once (4,5)
61 PM à la Brown version (5,3)
64 Before abandoning emigré Russian fighter (3)
65 Devastated city doctor needs surgery (7)
66 (see 10)
68/43 Sublet a house in poor condition (B&B occupancy) – financial fiasco (5,3,6)
71 Little ground gained by this offensive between French banks (5)
73 Youth has bearing on William's victory scene (5)
74 But not appreciated by those thirsty for good music? (5)
78/48ac. Ex-Foreign Minister, reported ground-breaker, seen with Ian, endlessly! (3,5)

£250 prize to first solution opened on 7.1.00. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 146

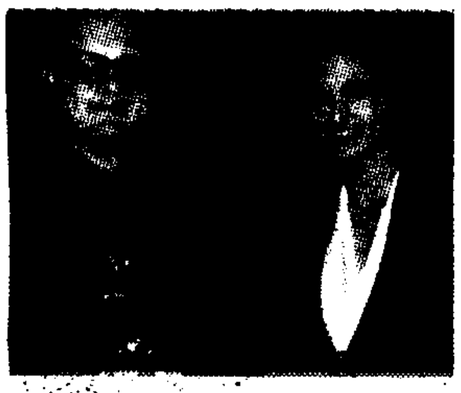
Winner: GEOFF WOLFE

ACROSS: 1 Arbiter 5 Bump off 9 Heidegger 10 Milan 11 Sea-wall 12 Tuesday 13/6 Honourable Member 15 Aria 18 Veal 19 Homophobia 23 Imperil 25 Gironde 27 Omaha 28 Kings Road 29 Footman 30 Crack up.

DOWN: 1 Ashes 2 Britannia 3 The Hague 4 Regalia 5 Borstal 6 (see 13) 7 Ogled 8 Funny-ha-ha 13 Have it off 14 Bum 16 Robin Cook 17 Charisma 20 Oilskin 21 Organic 22 Orgasm 24 Plato 26 End up.

IPFRONTERS

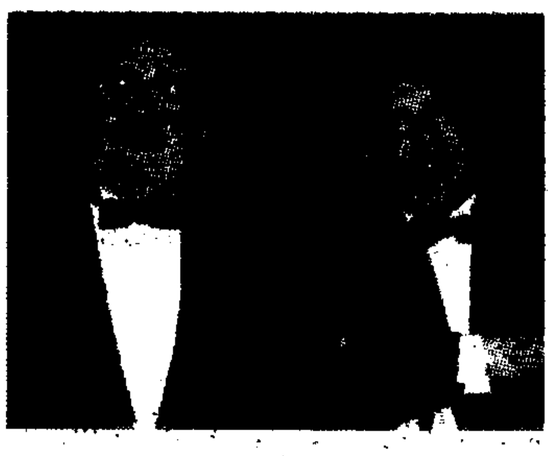
MILLENNIUM DOME NEW YEAR PARTY SPECIAL!



➲It's countdown to Y2K with Richard! And **Whiteley** so! Especially when the answer to the question "Who's with him?" is the delicious **Zenab Badawi**, the newsreader from Channel Phwoar!?!

➲These three are having one **El-ton John** of a time! By **George**, I hope he's not taking the Michael out of Mrs Blair! Because she's the **Cherie** on the Y2 cake!

Nice to see you, ➲ **Sir John**! And **Rice** to see you **Sir Tim**!! Let's keep up with the **Harvey-Jones** in Year 2K?



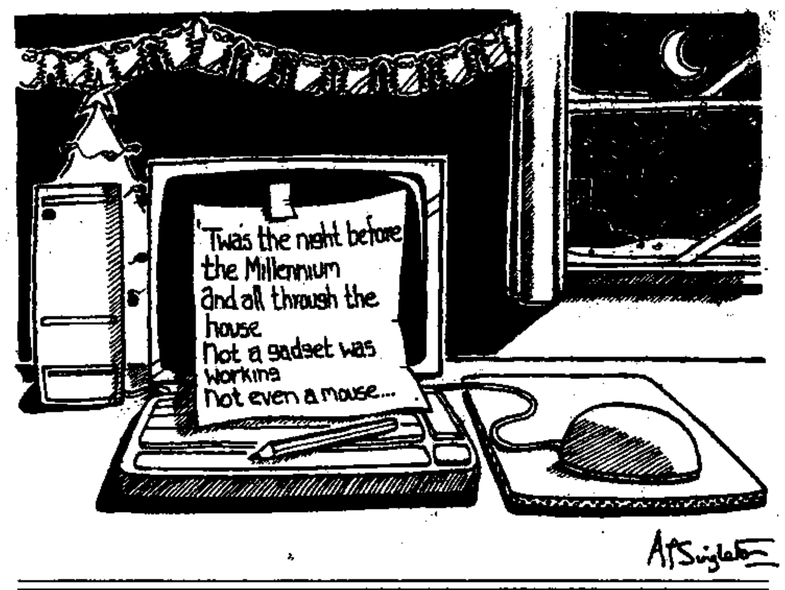
➲ What a **Stella** evening the Y2K has turned out to be! Especially when Miss **McCartney** has her designs on veteran comedy star **Leslie Phillips**!? Ding dong! Hello! What a carry on for Year 2K? *(You've done this one. Ed.)*

➲ Is **Denise** getting **Outen** about? And who's looking in your keyhole – don't be **Gross, man**, it's **Lloyd**! She's certainly something for the weekend! And Y2K not?!

Frying tonight!? ➲ **Stephen** certainly is, and we reckon he's Wilde about the gorgeous **Catherine**!? Give him an Oscar!? Talk about keeping up with the **Zeta Jones** at the big 2YK bash!? *(You've done this joke as well. Ed.)*

➲Who's the **McQueen** of the 2KY Ball? Is it **Zoe** on his left or is it **Naomi** on his right? Or is it **Alexander** in the middle?! Watch out – the **Campbell** is coming!? Jingle **Balls**!?!

And, remember, 2YK is company, three's a crowd at the *(You're fired. Ed.)*



RACE FOR MAYOR

'Faithless' Tories Unelectable

by Our London Staff
Dick Everywhere

THE CONSERVATIVE Party was sensationally ruled out of the election for London Mayor last night because of its record of "using and abusing" a string of different candidates.

"They pick a person, promise them that they will support them and be faithful to them and then dump them for someone else."

So said Mr Stephen Norris, one of the jilted ex-lovers of the Conservative Party.

"The Tories got into bed with Jeffrey and then left him for me. Now they have dumped me for four other people. I feel hurt, betrayed and angry."

But matters were complicated today when the Tories sensationally made up with Mr Norris and asked him back.

"OK, so they're bastards," he told reporters, "but I can't help loving them."

Ken Livingstone is Mayor.

TV PICK

DON'T MISS **Scrooge**, a new adaptation of the Dickens classic by Alan Bleasdale in which the mean old man of the original novel becomes a young woman working for charity. Tonight's episode is a prequel showing Miss Scrooge as a child living with her Aunt Pickwick and her black servant girl Samantha Weller. Says Bleasdale, "We have to see why Ms Scrooge grew up to become a fearless exorcist – a role that Dickens never really explained. Changing the season time from Christmas to Easter also makes more sense of the story. As does setting it in mediaeval Sweden."

CAST IN FULL

Miss Scrooge ..... SAMANTHA JANUS
Tiny Tim ..... JULIAN CLARY
Ghost of Diwali Past ..... JOHN THAW

And for the religious-minded... see in Christmas with the **Midnight Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?** Join the congregation at Carlton TV, where Chris Tarrant celebrates "the miracle of money" and ponders on "those important questions" — eg: "What is the capital of France?", "How many legs has an elephant got?" and (for a million pounds) "Can you recite the entire works of Shakespeare in Arabic?"

YOBS

HUSBAND

That Honorary Degree Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS MAUREENAM MOWLAMENSIS VULGARE "MO" POPULISSIMA MINISTERIA IN GOVERNMENTO ANTONINI BLAIRIS (DUX UNIVERSUS ET CETERA ET CETERA) CREATOR PACIS IN HIBERNIA BOREALIS ET AMICUS SANCTI GERALDO ADAMI SED INIMICUS TRIMBLI ET REVERENDO PAISLII DISMISSA AB BLAIRO IN ULTIMA HORA UT PROVIDARE IMPORTANTUM POSTUM PER PIETRO MANDELSONIO AMICO FAVORITTISIMO BLAIRENSIS (DUX UNIVERSUS ET CETERA ET CETERA) ET FURIOSISSIMA RETURNEBAT AD BRITANNICUM SIGNARE CONTRACTUM PER SCRIBENDO LIBRUM SENSATIONALEM CUM RUPERTO MURDOCHO ET RECEPIT CCCMLMLXXX DENARII ET DISSMISSA ERIT PROXIMO ANNO QUO POETA DICIT "AMO, AMASS, AFORTUNE".

© UNIVERSITATE DUNELMENSIS MXCM

DAME MAGGIE'S TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO THE STAGE

by Our Showbiz Staff **Sir Ned Twinky**

IT DOES not sound a very promising role for one of the greatest theatrical stars of the millennium.

A mad old woman with a tattered old handbag and a weakness for the bottle decides to camp out on the lawn of a shy, inoffensive Yorkshireman and proceeds to make his life hell.

Yet Dame Maggie pulls it off spectacularly, with a bravura display of shouting, ranting and screaming abuse.

The unfortunate William Hague (played by Alan Bennett) does his best to cope with the antics of the crazed old lady at the bottom of his garden. But Dame Maggie (played by Margaret Smith) steals the show, as she did in the earlier version when her victim was the hapless John Major.

WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

"Wonderfully repulsive – a real theatrical monster."
E. Heath, *Broadstairs Gazette*

"Dame Maggie is fantastic – theatrical Viagra."
Charles Spencer Moore, *Daily Telegraph*

"Come back, Dame Maggie – all is forgiven."
Paul Johnson, *Spanks and Spankmen.*

Booking Now – *"The Lady Thatcher In The Van".*
Tickets available in all parts of the house.

Dirt is a priority, Archer tells ESA

Materials Recycling Week

Banker Agent, Financial, Fugger, Gnome, Lombard, Medici, RIVER, Rothschild, Shroff

Bradford's Crossword Solver's Dictionary

ROY of the LOSERS
ENGLAND HAVE DRAWN GERMANY TWICE...
WE CAN BEAT THEM BOSS
IT'LL BE JUST LIKE 1966 ALL OVER AGAIN
ALL WE NEED ARE GEOFF HURST, MARTIN PETERS, BOBBY MOORE...
AND A RUSSIAN LINESMAN!
COOPER

MILLIONS BOYCOTT MILLENNIUM BORE CEREMONY AT DOME

(AND QUEUE TO GO ON WHEEL INSTEAD)

by Our Bores Staff **Borus Johnson**, Editor of the Spectacularlyboring

THE SPECTACULAR celebration, hosted by Lord Gnome, to mark "1000 Years of Boredom" was last night declared a "total flop" when only a handful of guests turned up to the prestigious Millennium Dome Experience situated on an old rubbish tip in East London.

Numbers were even fewer than expected when the newly-opened £8 billion Jubilee Line extension broke down due to signalling problems outside Birmingham New Street. **Mr John Prescott** was among the scores of guests trapped underground for several hours, and was thus unable to award the prize as "Transport Bore of the Millennium" to himself.

The few brave guests who did manage to reach the Dome were astonished at just how spectacularly boring the Dome experience turned out to be.

Before the ceremony began they were treated to a five-hour tour of the Tedium Zone, jointly sponsored by Wal-Mart and Vodaphone ("making the world a boring place").

They entered a giant yawning mouth several hundred feet high, created by students of the Royal College of Boredom, sponsored by **Charles Saatchi**, while a looped tape of the sound of a human yawn magnified 10,000 times stunned them into insensibility.

Turner Prize

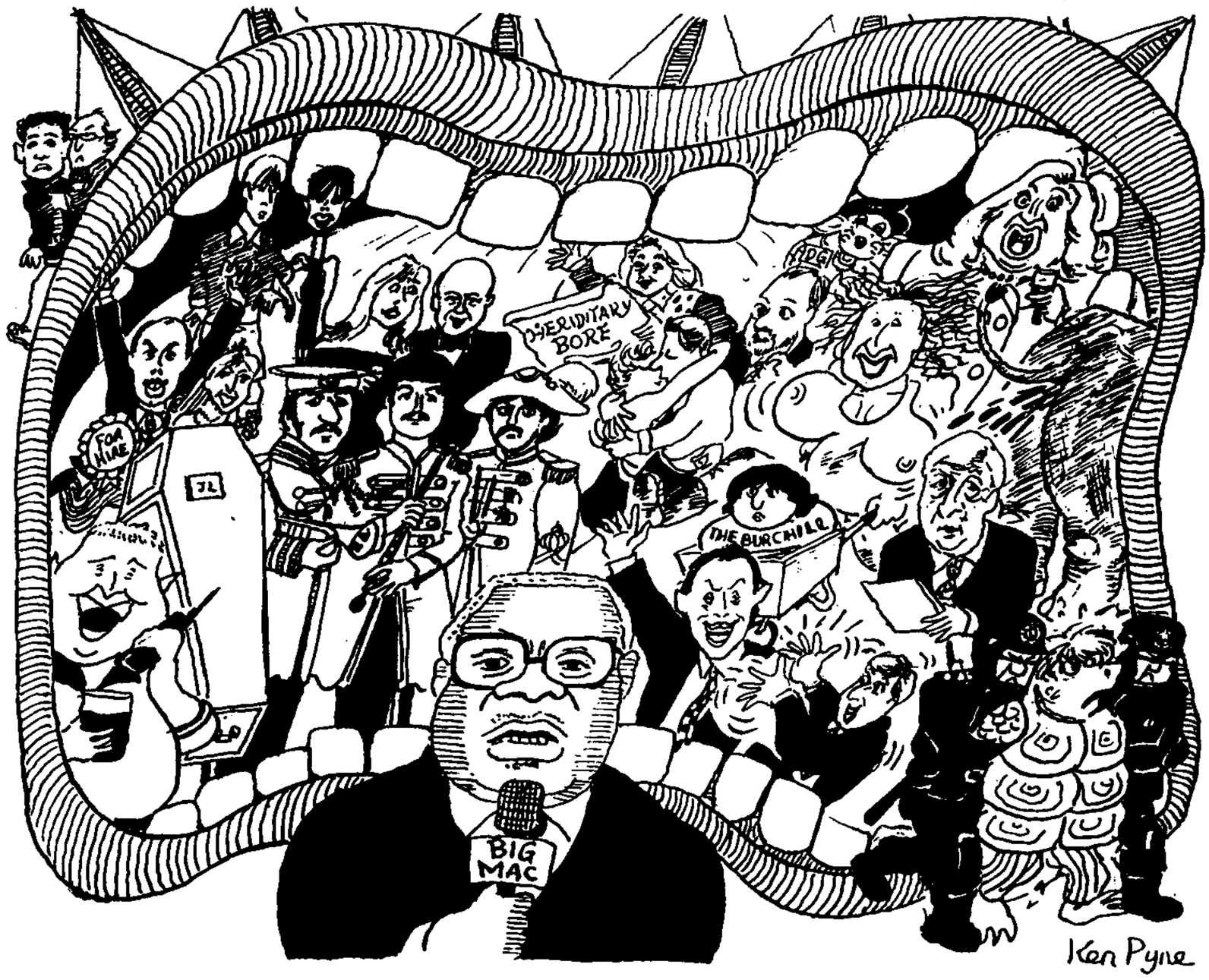
THE GUESTS were then woken up to applaud their host for the evening, **Sir Trevor McDonalds**, the celebrated news-reader, and man-of-letters, who was sponsored for the occasion by the American fast-food corporation of that name.

After a brief spontaneous demonstration against McDonalds, planned for several months on the internet by a "rainbow alliance" of anti-capitalist and pro-environment groups led by Boris Johnson's father dressed as a turtle, the police intervened with CS gas and water cannons to allow the ceremony to proceed.

"Bong!" began Sir Trevor, reading amusingly from his autocue, in a reference to his former starring role as presenter of "I Haven't Got Any News For You". He then told the audience that there had been no difficulty in choosing the outright winner of the 1999 "Bore of the Year" award – "the **Millennium** itself".

"The judges," he continued, "were particularly impressed by the millions of boring articles, listing 'The 100 Greatest Movies of the Millennium' (Notting Hill), 'The 100 Most Influential Musicians of the Millennium' (the Beatles), '100 Greatest TV Moments Of The Millennium' (Portillo Loses As Blue Peter Elephant Defecates Over Michael Parkinson), '100 Greatest Sporting Heroes of the Millennium' (Gazza), '100 Greatest Scientific Inventions of the Millennium' (the mobile telephone) and hundreds of others too tedious to mention."

Amidst deafening applause from Mr Alistair Campbell, the prime minister, the **Rt Hon. Tony Blair**, stepped up to accept the award and paid a moving three-hour tribute to himself as "the architect of a new Millennium, when 1000 years of Conservatism will be swept away and replaced by the new age of Blair-dom."



Will Hutton

SIR TREVOR then announced that, exceptionally, there would also be a runner-up for the Bore of the Millennium Award, which he said would, in any other year, have been the obvious winner.

Cardboard spectacles were then handed round to guests, to allow them to witness a recreation of the most spectacular non-event ever seen, namely the **Solar Eclipse**.

As the lights dimmed, the audience was treated to a special "Ode To The Eclipse" written for the occasion by the Poet Boreate Andrew Motion:

"I was watching television, when I saw it.
There it was, the moment we had all
been waiting for.
Day turned to night, light turned to dark,
It was unforgettable.
It was a pity though that it was
So cloudy. A bit like
Life itself."

Sir Trevor then handed over the microphone to BBC TV's "Bra-less Gardener of the Millennium" **Miss Charlie Dimmock**, to announce the winner of the "Julie Burchill Female Bore of the Year" trophy.

"The shortlist," she said, "included some outstanding candidates, such as Miss Ann Widdecombe (Tory), Ms Glenda Jackson (Old Labour) and that Lib Dem woman whose name no one can remember who's standing for mayor.

"But the winner," she declared," who has done most to promote the cause of women during the year is undoubtedly **Mrs Margaret Cook**, the former wife of the Foreign Secretary Mr Robin Cock *(check spelling)*, whose non-stop whingeing has won the hearts and minds of nobody at all."

The author and Observer agony aunt then came up to collect her award, accompanied by her partner, whom she proceeded to "snog" for several hours, in order to annoy her late husband.

Hannibal Lecter

MS DIMMOCK then took off what remained of her clothing, and handed over the microphone to **Miss Denise Van Outen**, who announced the shortlist for the "William and Ffion Award" for the year's most boring nuptials.

"The nommies," she simpered, "are Posh 'n' Becks, Rupe 'n' Wendy and the Earl and Countess of Wessex."

She too took off what little she was wearing, before announcing the winners as **"Edward and Sophie Windsor"**.

As the anthem "Hello! Comes With

Cheques Descending", especially composed by Andrew Lord Lloyds-Bank, was sung by the chorus of the new Royal Opera House, the award was collected on behalf of the Royal couple by the UK Sales Director of Rover Cars of Stuttgart, Mr Keith Blazer.

At this point there was the traditional demonstration led by the **Rt. Hon. Peter Tatchell** on behalf of the gay and lesbian community, protesting at the failure of the judges to include any same-sex weddings on the shortlist, such as that between Mr Portillo and Mr Hague, which he personally knew had taken place on 14 December 1997 at St Paul's Cathedral with Mrs Thatcher as the Chief Bridesmaid.

Mr Tatchell was led away by a number of psychiatrists, to be interviewed for a Channel *Four docu*-soap series on psycho-sexual disorders entitled "Sex Mad".

The New Statesman

THE STAGE was then reinforced for the arrival of **Miss Vanessa Feltz**, to announce the award for "Most Boring Newcomer of the Year".

"This has been an intensely boring year," read out the bulky star of Breakfast TV 's The Vanessa Fatz Show, firmly keeping her clothes on.

"The shortlist includes such new arrivals as the entire Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, Mr Roman Prodi's new sleaze-free European Commission, the Bill to outlaw foxhunting, as well as promising individual nominees such as Mr Roland Dyke, the exciting new rodent who is to run the BBC and Mr Charles Kennedy, the exciting new leader of the Liberal Democratic Labour Party.

"But the winner is the **Baroness Jay of Paddington**, whose consummate handling of the House of Lords reform process ensured that the hereditary peers are now more popular than at any time in their history."

The Baroness stepped up to receive her prize, a gold badge inscribed "I Love Tony", and made a movingly bad-tempered speech thanking her father James Callaghan for teaching her about the iniquity of a system which entrusted political power to people just because of who their fathers had been.

The Macpherson Report

MR Jonathan Ross then took over the microphone to present a special War Bore Award by announcing a live link-up with Mr John Simpson in a Belgrade hotel room, bringing the latest update on what he and other Western correspondents had had for breakfast that morning, while Mr John Pilger, reporting from his house in Neasden, revealed exclusively that millions of American planes had been shot down by the Serbs, although the wreckage had been spirited away by the CIA and aliens acting for the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Mr Ross joked that "Bore Bore was better than War War" (© Danny Baker – Gags 'R Us £1.99) and gave the coveted new award to **Mr Harold Pinter** for his poem "Kosovo My Arse".

Ben Pimlott

THERE WAS then a break for refreshments while snoozing guests were served with plates of genetically modified soya cakes presented by the Monsanto Chemical Corporation, sponsors of the Dome's Ecology Zone, washed down with foaming mugs of French sewage of the type fed to cattle, laced with Belgian-style dioxins.

As guests were carried to waiting ambulances by eager officials of the new Food Standards Agency, there followed a special "Millennium Pageant", narrated by **Lord Deedes**, describing what it had been like to cover the chief events of the last 1000 years for the Daily Telegraph.

The pageant began with a re-enactment of the "100 Years War" culminating in Henry V's invasion of France to force the Dauphin to import British beef.

Dame Glenda Jackson, dressed as Queen Elizabeth I, then explained why she was a much more suitable person to run the country than her rivals Mary Queen of Scots and Ken Livingstone.

Then **Mr Steven ("Steve") Norris**, dressed as Henry VIII, explained why, despite having six wives and mistresses, he was well-qualified to be head of the Church of England.

There were loud cheers at this point from **His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales**, who had entered the hall separately from the Mistress Royal Dame Camilla Parker-Bowles (although they later left together to go on to Mr Bean's Millennium Party in his amusing Oxfordshire "mini-dome").

e-commerce

THE PAGEANT droned on, covering century after century. Plantagenets, Tudors, Stuarts, Saxe-Coburg-Gothas all passed under Lord Deede's critical eye, as he recalled personally witnessing such key events as the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714 and the assassination of Spencer Perceval in 1812.

As thousands of primary schoolchildren dressed as soldiers from the First World War marched through the Dome, the audience was treated to a rendition of Sir Hubert Parry's newly-discovered oratorio "Hereward The Wake" which lasted for several days.

Eventually, the Heritage Secretary **Mr Chris Smith** intervened to protest that history was of no interest to young people and should have no place in the celebrations for the Millennium.

He stopped the pageant and declared that there would not after all be a special award for Bore of the Millennium.

"Britain has to stop looking backwards and look forward instead to celebrate the next 1000 years."

He then welcomed **Mr Graham Norton** to the ceremony to present a new Grand Trophy for Bore of the Next Millennium.

Mr Norton bounced onto the stage and amused the sleeping audience by ringing up some gay porn lines on his mobile telephone and making a series of jokes from the *Julian Clary Xmas Book of Single Entendres* (£3.99 Methuen).

He then read out the shortlist for Bore of the Next Millennium, specially compiled by an electoral college consisting of Chris Smith and Alastair Campbell.

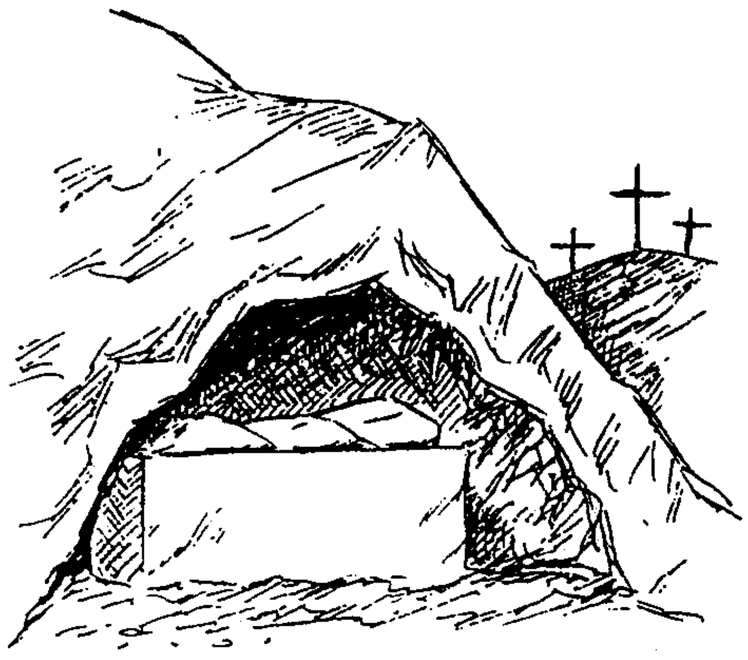
"And the shortlist is very short indeed," he quipped, "consisting of only one name. **Mr Tony...**"

At this point, an ominous rumbling filled the auditorium and architect **Lord Rogers** ran onto the stage dressed in a hard-hat, shouting "Don't panic. I assure you the Dome is built to last for at least ten minutes."

John Birt

BUT IT was too late. As large chunks of plastic began to rain down from the crumbling roof of the celebrated structure, the audience were additionally buried in a shower of the following items: hundreds of signed copies of John Major's Memoirs (and none of Lord Lamont's); thousands of unwanted "Vote Jeffrey Archer" badges; tens of thousands of Seedies *('CDs"surely? Ed.)* of George Michael's Album "Wham Bam Thank-you Officer", hundreds of thousands of videos celebrating 30 years of Monty Python; millions of copies of Tina Brown's exciting new magazine "Tat", tens of millions of Royal Academy mugs inscribed "We have seen the Monet Water-Lilies", and billions of unsold tickets to the Millennium Dome Experience.

All the building's lights and operating systems were then simultaneously hit by the 2YK bug, resulting in a huge conflagration, sending a vast sheet of flame racing up the Thames at 1150 kilometres per hour until the entire city was consumed.



AD 33...

1500...

2000

MOHAMED WINS PERSONALITY OF THE CENTURY AWARD

by Our Sports Staff
DES LYEMAN

THE COVETED title of Most Unpleasant Personality of the Century was awarded after a unanimous vote to the heavyweight Egyptian tycoon, Mohamed Ali-Fayed.

There were tears as he stepped up to accept his trophy in recognition of his remarkable achievement in 1997 of bringing down the Tory Government in their third round.

Safety Deposit Boxing

Said one judge, "With his dirty below-the-belt fighting and his feeble Punch, Mohamed Ali-Fayed will go down in history as the undisputed King of the Bung."

Mohamed first came to prominence under the name Cashinus Hand, but changed his name to Mohamed Ali-Fayed in the hope of gaining British citizenship.

Courts Personality

He then beat the heavyweight German bully, Tiny "Tiny" Rowland, in a ten-round contest lasting a record 15 years. Known as "The Rumble in the Food Hall", Ali's victory established him as the undisputed infighter of his generation.

Fugilist

Even now everyone still knows and hates his catchphrase:

"Float like a butterfly,
Sting like a fuggin' bee."

Sadly, Mohamed is now suffering from Hamilton's Disease, causing him to tremble, burst into tears, and talk complete nonsense.

An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers over the last year we may have given the impression that we thought the Millennium Dome was in some way a huge waste of money. Headlines such as "Mandelson's White Elephant Set To Flop", "Prepare To Meet Thy Dome" and "Give The Money To The NHS, Tony" may have inadvertently led readers to believe that we regarded the project with less than enthusiasm.

We now realise, having received our invitations to the Gala Night Millennium Experience, that the Dome is in fact the most exciting, innovative, unique, pivotal experience ever offered to anyone at any time in Human History.

It is furthermore a design triumph for Britain, with awe-inspiring constructions such as the Dixon's Zone, the McDonald's Experience and the Zone paid for by our proprietor.

We apologise unreservedly to Mr Blair and his colleagues for any distress that this misunderstanding may have caused.
© All Newspapers.

XMAS

Spot The Difference

KOSOVO	CHECHNYA
Invasion by Yugoslav troops supposedly in search of terrorists	Invasion by Russian troops supposedly in search of terrorists
Ethnic cleansing of the Kosovans	Ethnic cleansing of the Chechens
Kosovans forced to flee in mass exodus of human misery	Chechens forced to flee in mass exodus of human misery
Slobodan Milosevic is a much-hated tyrant	Boris Yeltsin is a much-hated tyrant
NATO throws everything at hand into the air campaign	NATO throws its hands in the air

Sunday Thanes

LADY MACBETH BREAKS DOWN IN COURT

"My husband is good man" – Shock Claim

by Our Court Staff **Joshua Rosencrantz**

THE wife of the controversial politician Mr Neil Macbeth today wept openly in the witness box when giving evidence for her husband, who has been accused of a multitude of offences.

"There is no way my husband could have murdered anyone," said Lady Christine Macbeth. "I went through his pockets every night and I never found a dagger in any of them."

She told the court how she and the accused had first met when they were members of the Young Feudalists Society at the University of Cawdor (formerly Glamis Polytechnic).

"I have stood by him through foul and fair," she said. There was laughter in court when she was asked by Mr Macduff QC, Counsel for the prosecution, "Which were you?"

Lady Macbeth continued to give evidence as to how her life had been ruined. "Neither of us can sleep," she sobbed, "and my husband has suffered from hallucinations over dinner."

"Would you like some water?" the judge asked. "No, thank you," she replied. "I only drink champagne."

The case continues.

BLAIR DOWN THE TUBE

Late News

Y2K FEARS CONFIRMED

FEARS that the Millennium Effect would cause some commonly-used equipment to behave erratically were confirmed today.

"It's a total mystery," said one shop owner. "This cash register has been working normally all year, but in the few days up to the 31st it's suddenly begun ringing up goods at two, three, even four times their normal prices."

However, retailers assured the public that the problem would be under control the minute they're sure they've squeezed every last penny out of desperate shoppers.

(Reuters)

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
The Second Millennium

So. Farewell then
The last thousand years.
Yes, a lot of things have
Happened during
That time
Too many to incorporate in
A poem
Of this length.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

Visit E.J. Thribb on his website www.sofarewellthen.com. His millennial collection of commemorative verses *Leaves On The Line Of Life* is now available from The Trouser Press, Corby EJ 17.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

As this is the last time I will be able to address you all before the next Millennium, let me begin by wishing you all a "Happy New Thousand Years!"

Aren't we all lucky, actually, to be living today, at this tremendously important turning point in human history!

I know I am. When I think of all the possibilities that are opening up before us here at St Albion's, I feel very humble. Possibly more *humble than* anyone else feels, because I am lucky enough to be the "man in charge" at this pivotal node in our parish history (not to mention that of the rest of the world!).

As it says in the New Labour Bible: "Behold, I shall make all things new" *(Book of Exclusive Revelations, 16.3)*. And that's the whole point of the message, actually, that I'm trying to get across.

Let me give you an example. Just before Christmas I had the privilege of an early glimpse of our "Millennium Tent", that for months has been going up on the wasteground where the gas works used to be.

And, my goodness, what an amazing sight it was! Everyone was working flat out to make sure that everything would be ready for our special "Secular Thanksgiving Service Event" on New Year's Eve.

The Brownies, the Scouts, the Women's Institute and the staff of Mr Murdoch's Adult Vids and Mags Company were all beavering away like mad!

I wish I could name all the people whose efforts have gone into making the Tent such an enormous success even before it's opened (although there are still plenty of tickets available from the Vicarage).

I didn't have time to look round all the attractions, actually, but I did have time to pose for a photograph next to the giant four-foot plaster-of-paris model of a dinosaur made by the Reception class of the St Albion's Primary School! Haven't we all got something to learn from the fate of those dinosaurs, who failed to move with the times and were wiped out by a comet (quite rightly!)?

And what an array of amazing exhibits have been put together by enterprising members of the parish! Everything on display, actually, conveys the excitement of the future, not the cobweb-ridden past!

I am thinking, for instance, of the amazing "organic mouse-mat" made from recycled egg boxes that is the star exhibit of the Tent's "Technology Zone" (thanks to the Science Department of the St Albion's Comprehensive Grammar School!); or the large pile of ten pence coins in the "Faith Zone". Impressed? And I only wish the critics had been there when I visited the

"Nutrition Zone" and was able to taste the "Millenniburger", which is five layers high, and comes courtesy of our local caterer Mr Ronald McDonald, at an amazing bargain price of only £19.99!

Perhaps then all the parish cynics would have had to eat their words (which would have been a lot less pleasant than one of Mr McDonald's delicious burgers, I can tell you!).

Isn't it a pity that when anything new is planned, there are always people who can only stand on the sidelines and sneer?

Their lack of vision over the Tent is symptomatic, actually, of their attitude to St Albion's as a whole.

Why can't they just show a bit of enthusiasm for a change, and admit that what we have achieved since I arrived two years ago is little short of a miracle!

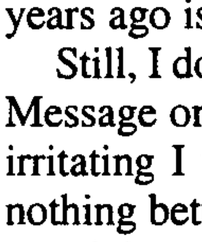
Still, I don't want to end this Millennium Message on a negative note by saying how irritating I find all those who can think of nothing better to do than be critical of other people!

Yours, actually,

Tony

PS. I would just like to remind parishioners that although the Tent has been sold out for months, there are still plenty of tickets available. Ring Mr Falconer on his mobile 'phone: 0898 2000 2000.

Notices



CHRISTMAS COLLECTION

It has been decided by the PCC that there will be no collection for the poor and homeless this year. Our parish "focus groups" have reported back that simply handing out money and food does nothing to solve our long-term aim of eradicating poverty for ever. (*"The poor will not always be with you,"* as it says in the Book of Ruthlessness!) T.B.

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mrs Mowlam, who has been having a bad time since her husband was sacked from his job, and she sadly lost her own job as leader of the Mission to St Gerry's. Let Mo remember that we all have to adapt to changing circumstances in life; and help her to understand that you can't just expect to go round asking Mr Murdoch for a lot of money in exchange for some tittle-tattle about the Vicar. May she remember the story of Judas Iscariot, who, despite being one of Our Lord's team, took a bribe in return for 30 pieces of silver (£350,000 in today's money). And look what happened to him! T.B.

Thank You

...all for your lovely cards. I think the one I like best is this one, showing Peter with his new baby!

But do remember, Peter, "a dog is for life, unlike your job!" T.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

For months the Vicar has been preaching to us that we should "turn the other cheek" when the French do the dirty on us. Many of us farmers in the parish will be bankrupt this Christmas thanks to that attitude. How about putting some backbone in the Vicar, not just

Yours sincerely,
F. Giles, C/o NatWest Bank,
The High Street.

The Editor reserves the right to cut all letters for reasons of space. A.C.

GNOME MILLENNIUM

www.gnometat.com

SMOKERS!

Introducing

THE Mobile SMOKAPHONE

✸ Fed-up with juggling mobile phone and fag? Need a free hand whilst talking to head office and having a drag?

Not any more! The two-in-one mobile smokaphone enables you to puff 'n' chat at the same time!

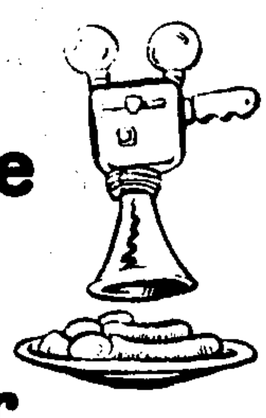
£25.99

Colours: Ash, smoke, tobacco. Ring plays theme tune from *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*

***WARNING**: The Surgeon General advises you that the Smokaphone will give you two types of cancer simultaneously.*

Be Safe in the Year 200 with the

Gnome Home GMO Tester



The label says it's GM-Free — but is it? Now, thanks to this breakthrough in Genetic Monitoring technology from Finland, you can be absolutely sure your soya beans are 100% natural. Red Light for Danger — Green means it's Green!

Price £3,798.25
(batteries not included)

Plays Elvis Costello's "She" from hit movie Notting Hill

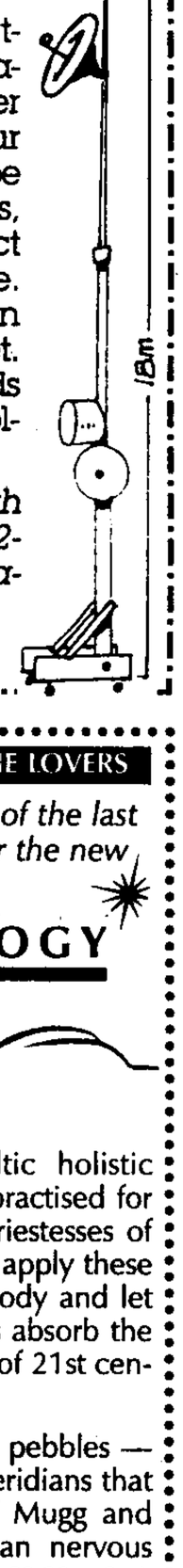
Say goodbye to mobile reception misery in the new Millennium!!!

Gnome-Mast

THE WORLD's first portable telecommunications mast. Wherever you are, your "Gnome-Mast" can be assembled in seconds, giving you perfect reception every time. Usable in street, on trains, in supermarket. When not in use, folds away into handy trolley.

★ *Compatible with Oranjeboom, One-2-Three, Cellulite, Yogaphone, etc.*

£10,816.



Scare of the Millennium!

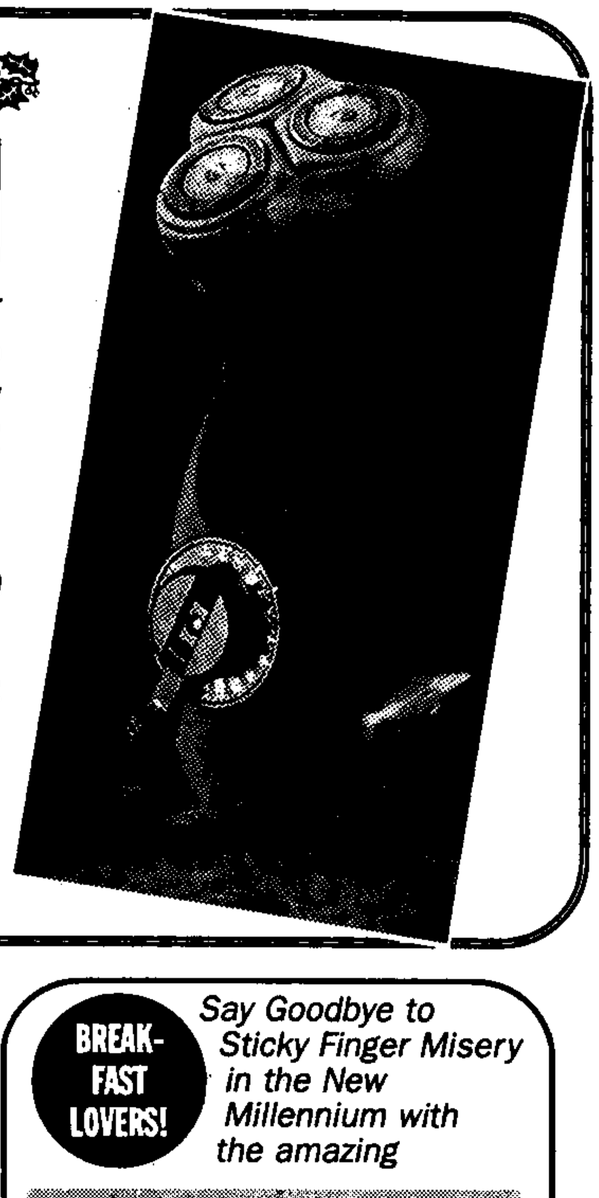
* The ANN * WIDDECOMBE Horror Mask

Friends and family will get the fright of their lives when you walk into the room wearing this ultra-realistic latex-style mask!

Everyone will think you are "Doris Karloff", the Tories' star performer, and that you are going to lock them up for ever! ***10p per dozen.***

SHAVERS!

WINDER-RAZE™



THIS incredible clockwork razor is the Millennium's answer to shaving. No more big electricity bills! No more soap sud misery! Shave anywhere, any time.

Even safe to use underwater!

★ ***10 million already sold in Malawi.***

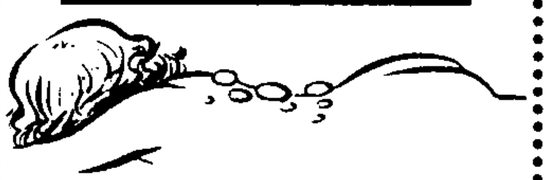
★ **One wind-up lasts at least five seconds.**

Plays Old Spice's ***Carmina Burana*** *advert theme tune.*

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE LOVERS

Rediscover the secrets of the last Millennium in time for the new one with

PEBBLEOLOGY



THIS ANCIENT Celtic holistic therapy has been practised for centuries by the priestesses of the Isle of Mugg. Simply apply these healing pebbles to the body and let their restorative essences absorb the toxic stresses and strains of 21st century life.

● Each bag contains 19 pebbles — the number of mystic meridians that converge on the Isle of Mugg and correspond to the human nervous system. **Price £25.99 (+ £360 p&p)**

New Millennium Breakthrough!

Vinyl Enthusiasts!

TURN YOUR CDs INTO LPs!

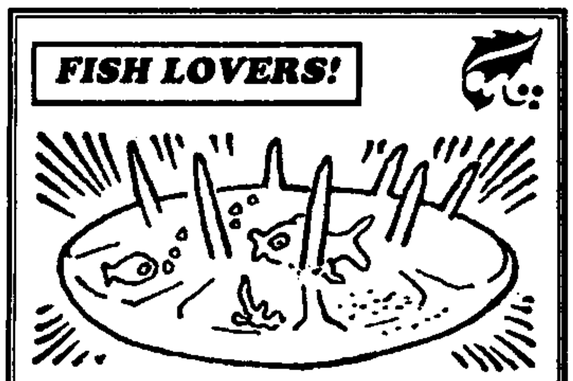
● *Simply send us your bland new CDs and we will convert them into characterful twelve-inch Long Playing Gramophone Records – with all the glorious hiss and crackle of yesteryear!*

£7.50 per conversion (£99 p&p)

** Also – videos converted to Super-8 cine for "real" memories.*

Send to: The Gnome Digital Remastering Centre, Unit 478, The Trading Estate, Basingstoke.

FISH LOVERS!



The Millennium Dome Fish Bowl

Now, at last, a replica of the world-famous Dome is available for your favourite fish. Watch them enjoy a day out in the Weed Zone, the Sand Zone, and the Coral Zone. Goldie will love it!

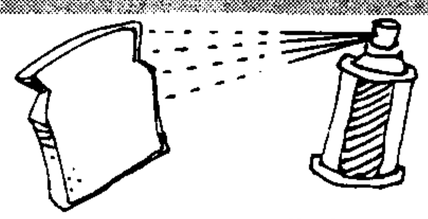
Price £732.99 (Allow 365 days for delivery)

Plays Classic FM's Handel's Water Music

BREAK-FAST LOVERS!

Say Goodbye to Sticky Finger Misery in the New Millennium with the amazing

JAM-O-SPRAY™

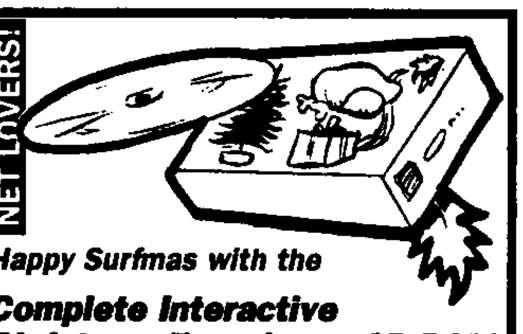


Easy to use, aero-propelled conserve distributor from the Philippines provides a perfectly even coating of your preferred jam or marmalade.

Also works for honey, lemon curd or Marmite. **Colours:** Blackcurrant, Blackberry, Black Cherry. **Price:** £59.99.

● *Plays theme tune from BBC's "Walking With Dinosaurs".*

NET LOVERS!



Happy Surfmas with the

Complete Interactive Christmas Experience CD-ROM

Say goodbye to all that festive misery thanks to this all-in-one electronic festive package (with Pentium 2000) that has Christmas for you! It will:

● *send and receive virtual cards and presents throughout the World Wide Web*

● *order and cook your turkey (plus trimmings)*

● *voice-mail your loved ones across the world on Christmas Day*

● *play multi-faith carols (not including Sir Clifford Richard's No. 1 hit)*

● *show Morecambe & Wise 1978 Xmas Special on continuous loop.*

£5,999 ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱

Gnomes Past

Authentic Millennium Gift

CRUSADER CIGARETTE LIGHTER

■ Exact replica of the original lighter used by Richard the Lionheart at the Sack of Acre, now in the Musée Gauloises, Paris. Decorated with Crusader Cross. Weighs approx. 10kg. **Price £179.99.**

MAIL MART

Past Gnomes

The "Tudor" Burglar Alarm

As used by Henry VIII at historic Hampton Court. Your neighbours will be green with envy when they see your genuine, half-timbered security *device blending* in tastefully with your lovely home. When burglars call, alarm plays "Greensleeves".

● *Also comes in "Classical", "Queen Anne" and "Art Nouveau".* **Price: £2,899 (inc VAT).**

● *As recommended by TV's Charlie Dimmock!!*

The CAR-DEN

Why waste your car roof when it can be converted overnight into a "Millennium Garden of Delights"? Comes complete with topsoil, mini-lawn, flower seeds, bird bath, yew hedge, etc. **95p**

Say Goodbye to Frozen Butter Misery with the amazing

MELT-O-BUTT™

NO MORE ruined bread or toast, thanks to the solar-powered Butter Melter, developed by the Canadian Space Agency in Quebec. Melt-o-Butt automatically unfreezes butter to the exact consistency required for optimum spreadability (33.3 °F or 78.2 ecus).

Price £38.22

✱ Says TV's One Fat Lady, Clarissa Dickson-Wright: "I could not live without my Melt-o-Butt."

WARNING: Keep away from direct sunlight.

Say goodbye to winter morning wheelie bin misery with the

SUPERWHEELIE 2000 Remote™

This breakthrough in Wheelie Bin technology from Namibia allows you to stay snug indoors while you direct your bin to the end of the drive by remote control.

Price: £999.99.

Range: Up to 3ft.

Colours: ● Conrad Black ● Red Ken ● Rabbi Blue

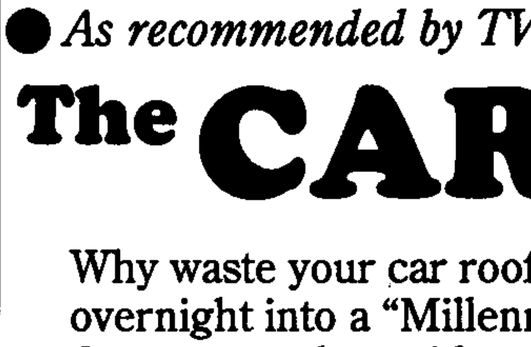
♪♪ *Plays Sibelius' Finlandia Theme as heard on Classic FM's* Smooth Classics at 7. ♪♪

E-Mail Lovers!

New From Sri Lanka

The Millennium's First Virtual

LETTER OPENER



At last, all the fun of quality letter opening in the Cyberworld! With this virtually handcrafted silver-and-ivory-style stationery tool accessing your e-mail will once again assume the traditional time-honoured pleasure of a bygone age.

£7,942.75 *(WARNING: Not Y2K compatible)*

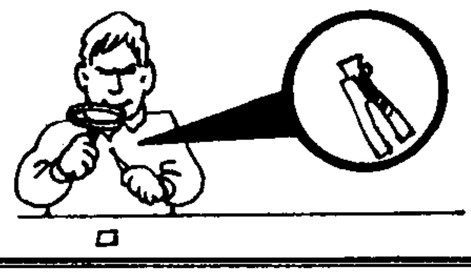
People with nothing to do!

World's Smallest JIGSAW PUZZLE

Will keep you amused until the next Millennium! Only the size of a first-class stamp, yet this incredible puzzle contains over 5,000 pieces. Years of fun for all the family!

Price £12.78

Choice of pictures: Rembrandt's "Self Portrait", Monet's "Water Lilies", Jackson Pollock's "Untitled, 1953".



New From Denmark!

Bacon lovers!

Special Millennium Offer

No more curly bacon misery with

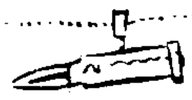
THE CORBY BACON PRESS

Simply remove rashers from grill or frying pan, pop into bacon press for 30 minutes and, as if by magic, bacon's "nice 'n' flat"!!

★ As used by TV's John Major!
£35.99p *(Bacon not included)*

Plays theme tune from new Star Wars Movie.

THE LUCKY PENDANT OF PINOCHET



JUST HANG this around your neck and you will be invincible against all misfortune. You might even find world-famous Lord Lamont dropping in for tea! Made from Chilean Gold (individually hallmarked and numbered by the Bank of Nigeria).

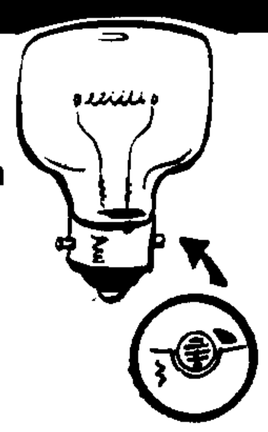
Let Lady Thatcher *(surely 'Luck'? Ed)* **shine on you in the new Millennium!**

Says famous convict Jonathan Aitken: "I wore the pendant in court and was sent down for only two years!"

£2,000,000 (plus p&p)

An End to Blackout Blues with VOCOBULB™

The world's first talking lightbulb! Simply switch on and VocoBulb tells you when it is about to blow!



Choice of voices: ● **Sir Trevor Macdonald** ● **Sir Kenneth Branagh** ● **Lord Archer** *(discontinued)* ● **Dame Joanna Lumley**

10p per box of 150

CELEBRATE THE MILLENNIUM WITH

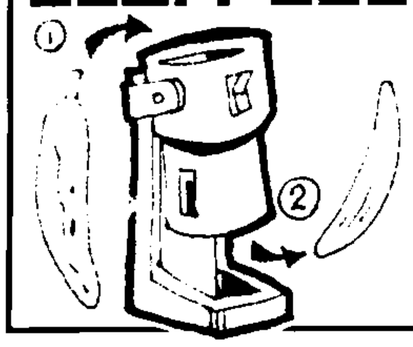
STEALTH FIREWORKS

DEVELOPED by Pentagon scientists during the Gulf War these miracles of state-of-the-art pyrotechnology make old-style fireworks look redundant. Stealth fireworks are guaranteed to be invisible and silent. Hours of fun.

***£278.99** for starter pack. (Includes stealth rocket, stealth catherine wheel and 10 stealth sparklers).*

★ *Millennium Fruit Sensation!!!* ★

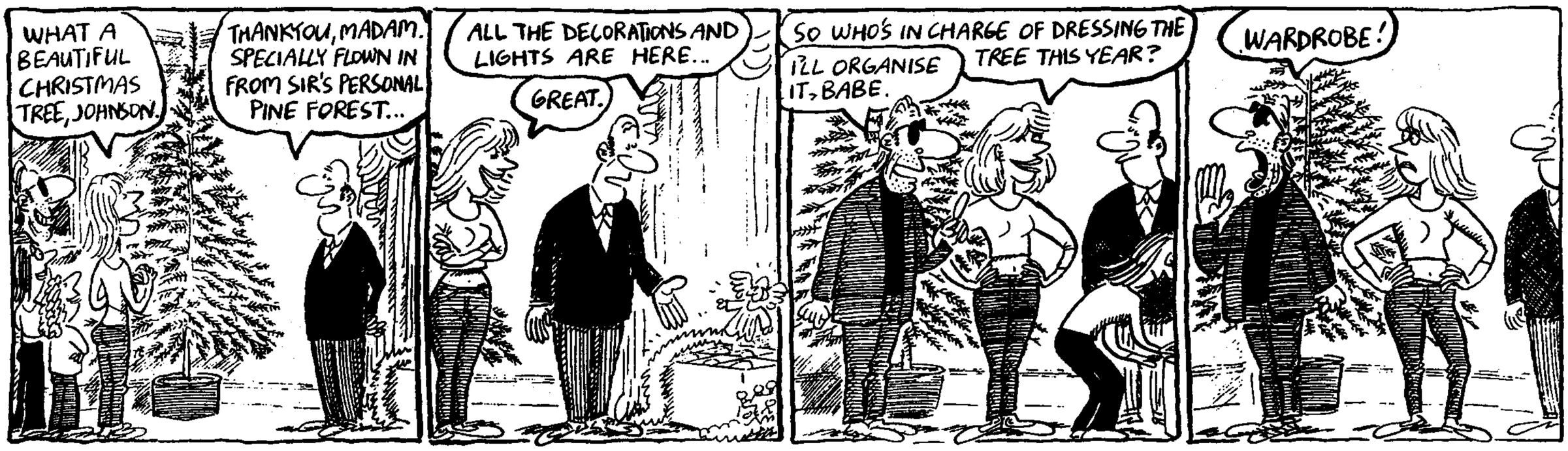
EEZI-PEEL



■ New from Zimbabwe, this incredible, state-of-the-art fruit peeler will put an end to your banana-peeling struggles! Simply pop banana into the "Eezi-peel" and within 15 minutes (average), hey presto, your favourite vegetarian snack is "ready to eat".

£999.99

Will peel bananas to following sizes: Baby, Euro Standard (48.6mm), Jumbo.


WHAT A BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS TREE, JOHNSON.
THANKYOU, MADAM. SPECIALLY FLOWN IN FROM SIR'S PERSONAL PINE FOREST...
ALL THE DECORATIONS AND LIGHTS ARE HERE...
GREAT.
SO WHO'S IN CHARGE OF DRESSING THE TREE THIS YEAR?
I'LL ORGANISE IT, BABE.
WARDROBE!

Eye Columnists Nominate Their Man Of The Millennium

Sid Schnozzer
(Cab No. 793) Taxi Driver

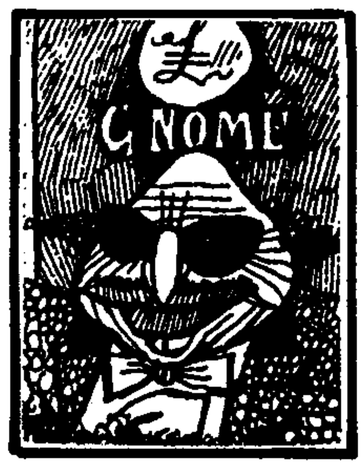
It's got to be Enoch, hasn't it? Very clever man, classical scholar and wasn't afraid to speak his mind vis à vis the you know what problem. No offence, guv.

Dave Spart
The Voice of Reason

Er... the total and obvious answer is Lenin who changed the entire capitalist military industrial complex and er... was easily the most talented of the Beatles... er...

A. Doctor

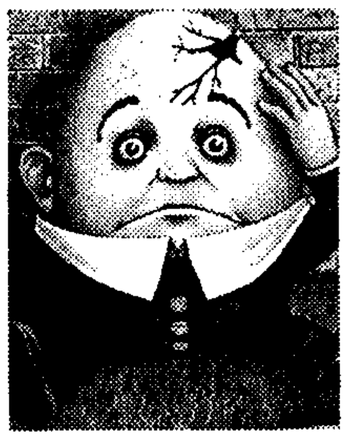
As a doctor I am often asked "Who is your man of the millennium?" The simple answer is "Go home, get some rest, it's only a virus."



Lord Gnome
Myself

Sally Jockstrap
"The Voice of Sport"

From the world of cricket I would nominate Muhammed Beckham. No one will ever forget his 20 ft putt to win the Grand National in 1947 and bring the Admiral's Cup home to Germany.



Nigel Pratt-Dumpster
Gossip Columnist

I nominate the Hon. Hugh Heegh-Edde, son of the 3rd Marquess of Sowatt, who is the cousin of the delightful Lady Drivella Rubbish whose two pekinese dogs (Dull and Boring) once bit a horse belonging to Lord No-one-gives-a-toss *(That's enough Pratt-Dumpster. Ed.)*

Phil Space
Feature Writer

As I contemplate this thorny question, so many names and faces spring to my fevered mind. The worlds of art, literature, science, technology and music all offer up their singular *(cont. p. 94)*

Peter McLie
The World's Worst Columnist

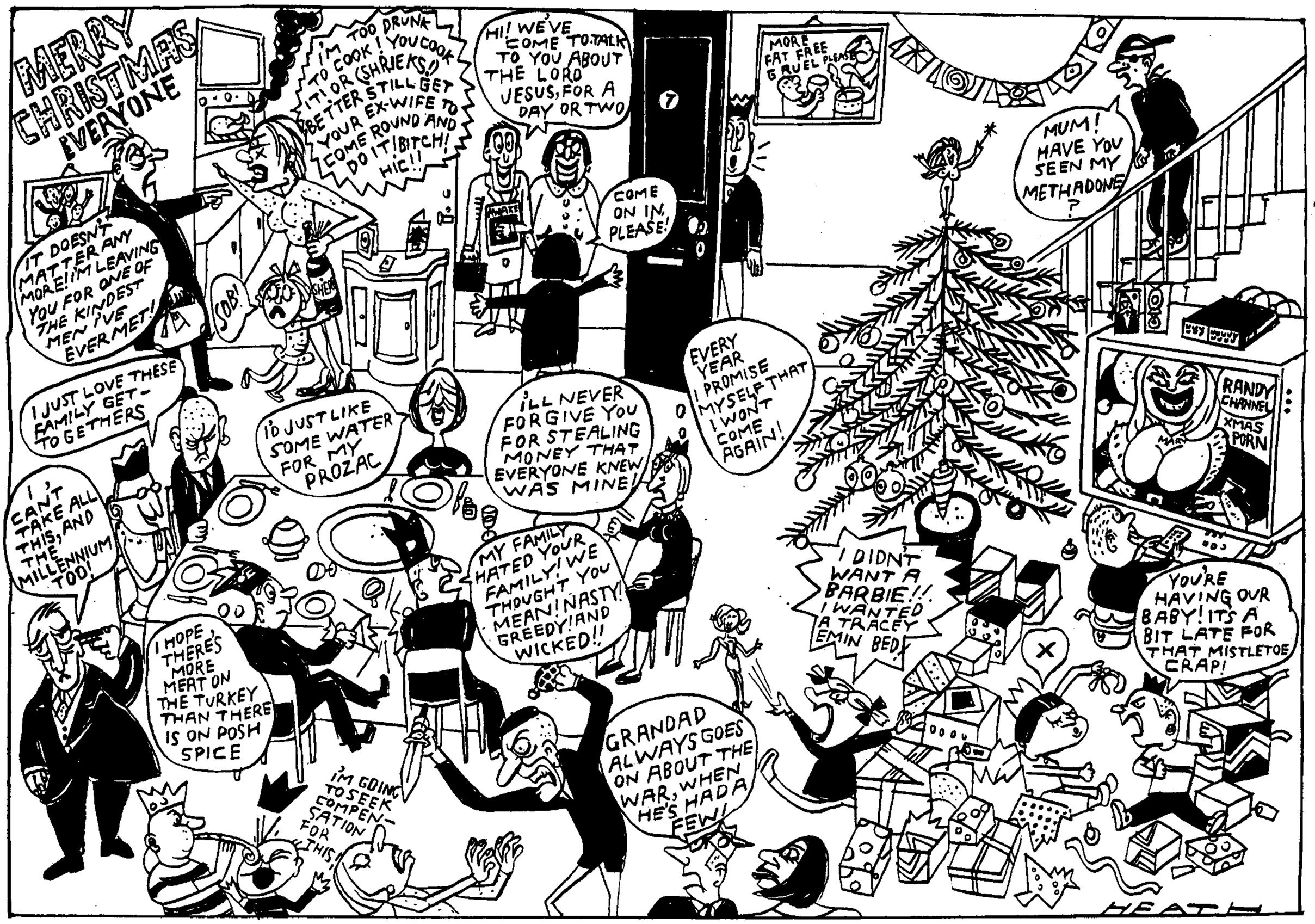
My nomination is to the man who in 1945 gave us the most significant scientific breakthrough of all time which changed the world for ever and left us in its shadow – the Trouser press! Hats off to Mr Corby!

Glenda Slagg

Any man will do.

OKAY. SO WE'RE GONNA DO THIS OURSELVES...
NOW, I'LL DECORATE THE TREE AND YOU PHOTOGRAPH IT, OKAY, PIXIE?
YES, DAD.
WE'LL NEEDA STEPLADDER IF WE'RE GOING TO DO THIS PROPERLY THOUGH.
COMING RIGHT UP, SIR.
JUST ONE MORE PLEASE, GARY! BIG SMILE! THANKS.
CLICK CLICK CLICK

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW


MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE
IT DOESN'T MATTER ANY MORE!! I'M LEAVING YOU FOR ONE OF THE KINDEST MEN I'VE EVER MET!
I'M TOO DRUNK TO COOK! YOU COOK IT! OR (SHRIEKS!) BETTER STILL GET YOUR EX-WIFE TO COME ROUND AND DO IT! BITCH! HIC!!
SOB!
HI! WE'VE COME TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THE LORD JESUS, FOR A DAY OR TWO
COME ON IN, PLEASE!
MORE FAT FREE GRUEL PLEASE
MUM! HAVE YOU SEEN MY METHADONE?
I JUST LOVE THESE FAMILY GET-TOGETHERS
I CAN'T TAKE ALL THIS, AND THE MILLENNIUM TOO!
I'D JUST LIKE SOME WATER FOR MY PROZAC
I'LL NEVER FORGIVE YOU FOR STEALING MONEY THAT EVERYONE KNEW WAS MINE!
EVERY YEAR I PROMISE MYSELF THAT I WON'T COME AGAIN!
RANDY CHANNEL
XMAS PORN
MY FAMILY HATED YOUR FAMILY! WE THOUGHT YOU MEAN! NASTY! GREEDY! AND WICKED!!
I HOPE THERE'S MORE MEAT ON THE TURKEY THAN THERE IS ON POSH SPICE
I'M GOING TO SEEK COMPENSATION FOR THIS!
GRANDAD ALWAYS GOES ON ABOUT THE WAR, WHEN HE'S HAD A FEW!
I DIDN'T WANT A BARBIE!! I WANTED A TRACEY EMIN BED!
YOU'RE HAVING OUR BABY! IT'S A BIT LATE FOR THAT MISTLETOE CRAP!
HEATH

Those Christmas and Millennium Holiday Films In Full

Boxing Day Friday 10.45 am (BBC2)
They Flew To Bruges (1981)
Made for TV movie starring Lee Majors as Squadron Leader Brad Tulkinghorn and Angie Dickinson as Nurse Helfgott. Re-make of classic British war film with all-American cast.

Eye rating: Z-z-z-z-z

Christmas Eve Day 2.45am (Channel 4)
Robo Bee (1987)
Early Schwarzenegger sci-fi horror film in which Arnie is a US marine commander sent into a research institute where the top secret deadly Robo Bees have taken over.

Eye rating: B-z-z-z-z

Millennium Bank Holiday Tuesday 3.20pm (Channel 5)
Two Fat Ladies: The Movie (1998)
The late Jennifer Paterson and her culinary chum Clarissa Dickson-Wright co-star in this comedy romp, where the two "fat ladies" foil a plot by animal rights activists to kidnap the Prince of Wales when he is hosting a World Environmental Conference at Highgrove. Stephen Fry is marvellous as the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Eye rating: Z-z-z-z-z

New Year's Day Eve 8pm-10.30pm (BBC1)
Walt Disney's Jeeves and Wooster (1986)
Fully animated classic version of the P.G. Wodehouse stories, with the voices of John Lemmon as Wooster and Walter Matthau as Jeeves. But the star of the show is Pinky, Wooster's pet elephant (marvellously voiced by Mel Brooks). 230 minutes.

Eye rating: Dronez-z-z-z-z

New Year Saturday Thursday 4.45pm (Channel 4)
The Los Palamos Trail (1957)
Legendary John Wayne epic set in Montana in which he reprises his earlier role as the gun-totin' Marshall Bob Andrews as he helps a group of settlers cross the infamous Cappuccino Canyon in Colorado. Watch out for Maureen O'Lipman as the feisty widow who Wayne surprises taking a dip in the croc-infested Rio de Rio.

Eye rating: Unsuitable

Boxing Day Eve 9.45pm (Channel 5)
The Shag (1991)
A group of young carpet-salesmen squatting in a Dublin tenement block set up a pop group and win the Eurovision Song Contest for "auld Oireland". Terry Wogan excels playing himself, and Sinead O'Connor is marvellous as the Singing Nun.

IRA-ting: Boom!

New Year Bank Holiday Sunday 7.30am (BBC2)
Il Sentimentale (1989)
Touching story of lonely Italian lighthouse keeper who flashes romantic messages to the wheelchair-bound daughter of a local fisherman. Years later they meet at Lourdes, only to discover that they are brother and sister. Starring Armando Janucci and Christina Odone as the ill-fated lovers.

Eye rating: Mama Mia!

New Year Bank Holiday Monday 5.46am (Sky Premier Garbage)
Police Academy 157 (1991)
Few of the original cast remain, as the rookie-cops fly to the moon to police the new colony of Luneville. "Not quite as funny as Police Academy 156, but still worth tuning in to Sky for," says Sky's Barry Norman.

Eye rating: Not Much Cop

Watch out for Geri Halliwell in her first solo full-length movie role as special agent Jemima Bond in **The Spice Who Loved Me, Christmas Day 3.15pm** (BBC1).

WENCESLAS ATTACKED BY BLAIR

by Our Welfare Staff
Jon Snowman

AN ELDERLY Bohemian philanthropist was yesterday criticised for "a nanny state approach to welfare at Christmastime" by the Prime Minister.

According to reports, the rich, Czechoslovakian-born do-gooder had spotted an old man gathering winter fuel round about Boxing Day and had then personally distributed food and wine, assisted by a small child in his employ.

Said a furious Blair, "This was simply encouraging the old man to stay out in the snow looking for further hand-outs. Wenceslas did nothing to provide a long-term solution to the old man's problems in terms of reintroducing him into the Czech labour and community infrastructure."

GLENDA SLAGG

The Millennium Dame!!
(Voted Most Atrocious Journalist Of The Last 1000 Years)

SIR CLIFF'S Number One record?!! Doesn't it make ya wanna puke?!?! OK, so I haven't heard it!!! Who cares?!? I still hate it, with old Peter Pan a-screechin' and a-preachin', a-brayin' and a-prayin'!! How dare you mix up the Lord's Prayer with Auld Lang Syne, Mr Grandfather Christmas!?!?! You're one auld acquaintance I'd like to forget??! Geddit?!?! Our Father, deliver me from Cliff – that's my millennium prayer!?!?!

HATS OFF to Sir Cliff, the Peter Pan of Pop, who proved his critics wrong with his heartwarming heavenly hit!?! At least someone has got the guts to put religion back into the hit parade with his clever Christmas cocktail of the Lord's Prayer and Knees Up Mother Brown?!?! All together now, "Our Father... er... Amen"!!??

MRS HAMILTON?!?! Put a sock in it, for Gawd's sake!?!? Boo hoo do you think you are, a-weepin' and a-creepin' in the witness box?!?! Geddit!!! Why are you getting blubby over hubby??? (Auntie Glenda's li'l rhyme??!) You're a disgrace to all of us gals, standing by your man like Tammy Wynette!?!? D.I.V.O.R.C.E. him, you boot-faxed battle-axe and let him empty his own pockets!!!?!??

CHRISTINE HAMILTON!?!? Put out the flags for this wonderwoman who is not afraid to stand by her man?!?! When the going gets tough, the tough start crying their hearts out!!?!? Good on yer, darling – at last there's a woman who is not afraid to drink a lot of champagne for breakfast??!?

SIR PAUL McCartney!?!? Aren't-chasickof him??? So he's gone back to the Cavern!!?! Who cares??? Why can't you take the long and winding road back to obscurity, Macca??? Geddit!!?! All together now, "You're a nowhere man"!! Geddit??!?

Veronica Lake

HATS OFF to Paul McCartney who has gone back to the Cavern where it all began all those years ago!?!? Doesn't it bring a lump to your throat??! We still need you, Sir Paul, now that you're 64!!?! All together now, "It's been a hard day's knighthood"!!! Geddit???

HERE THEY ARE, Glenda's Millennium Stockingfillers!?!?!

SIR BILL DEEDES – Fancy a Knight with me??? I hope I can get "a-rise" out of you!?!? Geddit??!?

NELSON MANDELA – Forget Charlie Dimmock!?!? Let me dig around in your bed!?!?! Geddit??!?

STEVE NORRIS – Can I be Number 94 pleazzeee!!

See ya in 2000!

Byeeeee!!!!!!

New From Gnome-Tel

CHARLOTTE CHURCH
"VOICE OF AN ANGEL"
Sings Traditional Christmas Music

(Recorded live at Bluewater Shopping Centre with the London Symphony Chorus and The Viennese Whirl Boys Choir)

CELEBRATE the wonder of the Nativity with a selection of the most beautiful Christmas songs of the Millennium. Favourite traditional hits include:

- **Unto Us A Child Is Born** (Handel)
- **So Here It Is Merry Christmas [Everybody's Having Fun]** (Slade)
- **I Wish It Could Be Christmas [Every Day]** (Wizzard)
- **It'll Be Lonely This Christmas [Lonely and Cold]** (Mud)
- **Happy Xmas [War is Over]** (Traditional Japanese carol arr. Lennon/Ono)

and the all-time classic

- **Fairytale of New York** (Traditional Irish Carol. Arr. Pogues) – *You're a bum/You're a punk/You're an old slut on junk/Lying there almost dead on a drip in that bed/You scumbag, you maggot/You cheap lousy faggot/Happy Christmas your arse/I pray God it's our last.*

Send now for the purest Christmas magic and let Charlotte "Voice of an Angel" Church transport you to the inner peace that is Christmas.

Voted Classic FM's Top Classical CD Of 1999

Gnome-Tel wishes you a Mellow Christmas

DIARY

MILLENNIUM DREAMS

Norman Tebbit: Britain in 1999. Not a pretty picture. Proud old folk dying in the street while government ministers of the limp-wristed variety refurbish their living quarters in shades of mauve and cerise at the taxpayers' expense.

Fully paid-up lesbians permitted to drive our historic double-decker buses.

Black people – as we must learn to call them – running loose in our streets.

Barefoot Spaniards choking up our B-roads with their under-nourished donkeys and unlicensed carts – unlicensed deathtraps, more like.

Germans in their well-polished jackboots running roughshod over this once-great country. Whipping us with a leather cat-o'nine-tails until we beg for mercy. And then increasing our humiliation by forcing us into tight-fitting rubber-gear and nipple-clamps and making us squeak like hamsters.

Doesn't sound very wholesome to me. Nor to you, I expect – unless of course you are a homosexual single-parent. With a stud through your tongue. And elsewhere.

My dream for the New Millennium?

A more closed and less tolerant Britain.

A Britain ill-at-ease with itself.

A Britain fit for Anglo-Saxon heterosexuals to walk the streets without fear of being sodomised in broad daylight by the workshy.

Yoko Ono: To honour John's memory, I shall never forget the contribution he made to writing what was to be our greatest hit, "Imagine".

"Imagine no possessions," we sang. "It's easy if you try." That song really struck a chord with people all over the world. Nearly thirty years later, it's a dream that's come true. I don't even have to imagine very positive investments valued at five hundred million dollars, including apartment blocks in Manhattan, L.A. and Chicago, office developments in Dallas and whole forests in Canada. Beautiful. Just beautiful. And I hope some day you'll join us, and the world will live as one. But not just yet please. Overseeing our global business portfolio means that I sadly am unable to include all the people of the world in my dreams for the new Millennium.

Imagine no religion
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only prime-site real estate operated through a wholly-owned subsidiary
Stretching to the sky.

Peace.

Jeffrey Archer: A new Millennium. New hope for all mankind. From 1997-1999, I enjoyed five very happy years as the Mayor of London before stepping down of my own accord to take on exciting new challenges. My good friend Boris Yeltsin – we were members of the first manned space-flight together in the early 1960s – has been begging me for years to take over the reins of Mayor of Moscow and I don't like to disappoint him. But first I shall be nipping down to Greenwich to auction the Millennium Dome which should produce anything up to £12.50 for a favourite charity, after reasonable expenses are taken into account. So let no one say I'm "finished"!! With best wishes for the New Millennium from Jeffrey, Mary, William and Ffion.

Fergal Keane: My dear son, it is six o'clock in the morning and I am typing this with one hand while changing your nappy with the other. It is by no means an easy business. Twice, I've put a nappy through the printer and wrapped around your infant bottom a heart-rending piece about the soft tears I have wept for all mankind.

What are the hopes and dreams of this love-driven reporter, this battered yet still warmly optimistic soul, your award-winning father, as we sit here, you and I, I and you, on the cusp of this, our New Millennium?

Africa. Asia. South America. Bosnia. Will there be no end to the places wherein I weep? Travelling to the Millennium Dome the other day, I came across a man – a man too old to be a youth, yet still too young to be old – and that man stopped me and asked me if I knew the way to the bus-stop.

His exact words – I shall not lightly forget them, son, not in this world, nor, God willing, in the next – were these: *"Do you know the way to the bus-stop?"*

Call it a reporter's intuition, call it my extraordinary humanity, call it what you will. But within seconds it came to me that here was a man who did not know the way to the bus-stop. My heart quivered. My jaw wobbled. My eyebrows formed an upturned V. My pen rose as if borne aloft by angels.

I looked him full in the face. It was the least I could do. "No, I do not," I said to him. "No, I do not know the way to the bus-stop."

It was the truth, but sometimes the truth is not enough. It wasn't only that man I had let down. I had let myself down. And I had let you down, my son. I had travelled across many lands, winning many accolades. Yet here in a street in South East London I could not direct my fellow man to the nearest bus-stop.

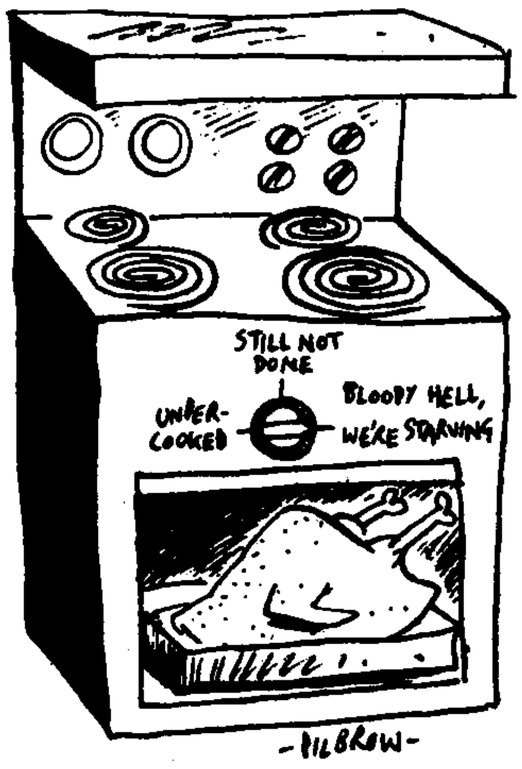
Faced with the extent of my own ignorance, I crept into a corner. And collapsed in shame.

And this incident set me thinking about my hopes for the coming age. In this world of light and shade, this world of good and bad, of strength and weakness, horror and pity, big and small, rise and shine, pay and display, there will always be those who do not know their way to the bus-stop. And, yes, there will always be those, like me me me me me, who do not know how to direct them. Yet, as the sun breaks like a rainbow over the dawn of the new Millennium, you and I must hope that buses continue on their allotted routes. For then, and only then, will our despairing yet ever-hopeful civilisation get to wheresoever it wishes to go.

Harold Pinter: Don't "Happy New Millennium Harold" me, chum. Not when I'm flat on my stomach taking it up the arse from NATO. You think I'm enjoying myself, chum? Is that what you think? Well, let me inform you, buddy, that I'm not. And my wife, Lady Antonia, agrees with me. She's as shit scared as I am about the New Millennium and can see no bloody point in going on. And she'll confirm it when she gets back from recording the all-star "Round Britain Quiz" with John Julius Norwich, for transmission some time in the New Year.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

PILBROW'S CHRISTMAS



"That one's from our computer programmer..."

POLLY FILLER'S CHRISTMAS

IT's the Somme – only worse. Yes, it's Christmas day in the Filler household. OK, so they didn't have turkey and trimmings in the trenches – well, lucky bloody them! And, frankly, what's a little shell shock compared to the sound of the toddler Charlie screaming because his useless father, Simon, won't assemble his Lego Star Wars Naboo Assault Craft because he's too busy watching *Jeremy Clarkson's Celebrity Camel Racing From Dubai* on Eurosport...

Honestly, no-man's-land is a kid's playground compared to our kitchen where the German au-pair has put the crackers in the oven and stuffed the turkey with the mince pies! As soon as she's done the washing-up, she can pack her bags and go. Honestly, I thought the Germans were good at Christmas, rather than just standing around crying because they are homesick for their families in Heidelberg.

AND as for efficiency – God knows how they kept the war going for so long when Heidi can't even manage to decorate the tree, lay the table, cook the lunch and look after the children while I have a well-deserved glass of Fizz in front of the fire (which, I might add, she failed to light properly)!

Give me mustard-gas any day! In fact, I am amazed they had a truce on December 25th in 1914 – I would have just kept fighting rather than have to face Christmas and pretend that Simon's pathetic apology for a present was anything other than disappointing. (Does *anyone* want a Tiffany bangle?)

In 1914 they said it would all be over by Christmas. In the Filler household it's only just started.

Happy bloody Christmas to all my readers.

(Note to the Editor: Sarah, hope this is OK. We're off ski-ing over Christmas (sans brat!), so I've had to write this column a bit in advance! Hope you like the war stuff! Ciao! Polly)

GRAND ARCHER BUBBLE COMPETITION

Readers are invited to submit speech bubbles for the above photograph.

Send your entry to Private Eye (Archer Competition) at 6 Carlisle St, London W1V 5RG by Friday 7 January 2000.

UNIQUE PRIZE

The winner will receive a one-off quality wooden toilet seat from Potentials (www.potentials.co.uk), featuring the Private Eye Archer cover from 26 November on the inside of the seat cover and an image of Westminster on the upper face.

HUSBAND

Finally, an apology. In my review of the first episode of *St Paul's* (BBC2), published in Monday's paper, I inadvertently misquoted Mr John Mustion, the cathedral's scaffolder and cleaner. The quality of the review tape was not good and I thought he referred to "some of the bastards" when in fact he said "some of the parsons".

The Times

Yesterday we issued an 'Apology Notice' apologising for a printing error which led to the current posters for our range of HB Ice Cream being accidentally printed upside down.

Due to an oversight by our advertising agency the word 'apology' was spelt incorrectly and read 'Aplology'.

Advertisement in Irish Times

Never Too Old...

A Millennium Short Story

by Dame Sylvie Krin

THE STORY SO FAR: Media mogul Rupert Murdoch has been invited to give a lecture on The Global Communications Revolution *at his old* college at the famous Oxford University. Now read on...

"LADIES and gentlemen, I give you Mr Rupert Murdoch, one of the most distinguished communicators of this or any other era. And, incidentally, one of the richest!"

Sir Robin Flunkey, the Master of University College, sat down as the glittering roomful of academics, dressed in their traditional "mortar boards" and gowns, burst into spontaneous applause.

As the great man approached the lectern, Sir Robin smiled gratefully and folded away the cheque for £1 million, made payable to "University College" and drawn on "The Rupert Murdoch Educational Foundation, c/o The Sun".

"G'day, everyone." The multi-media tycoon glanced nervously through his bi-focals at the front row of the audience of scholars and men of letters seated before him.

There, waiting expectantly for his words of wisdom in the sudden hush, were such great thinkers of the age as Lord Rees-Mogg, the prophet and seer who alone had foreseen the Stock Market Crash of 1999 and the return of the ice age in the same year.

There was Sir David Yelland, the towering genius of Fleet Street, who, legend had it, could count up to 3 and even recite from memory nearly all of the 26 letters of the alphabet in the correct order.

"And who was that next to him?" Rupert wondered – the curly-haired fellow with glasses who was already applauding enthusiastically even before the lecture had begun.

"Oh yes," he thought. "It's that creep Stoppard, or Stoddart, or something, who nearly landed me in the dingo doodoo over some pissy libel case." The proprietor of the Times made a mental note to sack Stoddart next time he was in Wapping.

THEN his heart missed a beat. For, sitting at the end of the row, in a cherry-pink, décolleté silk kimono from the House of Pirelli, sat the apple of his eye, his golden princess from the land of shark's fin soup and egg-fried rice to go: Wendy Deng.

"Get on with it, Rupert," she mouthed, silently urging her devoted husband to proceed with the lecture and his views on the key role played by the internet in the globalisation of the worldwide trade network.

"The opportunities presented by e-commerce open up a new vista of cyber-possibiliities," he read out in a low Antipodean drone, from the text prepared for him by Steve Nerd, the editor of On-Line, the Times's weekly on-line section.

"Only by confronting the global challenge of this new technological dimension can we hope to surf the wave of the 21st Century and emerge with a strengthened communications infrastructure to serve the needs of the new millennium."

"JEEZ," the Antipodean entrepreneur thought to himself, as he ploughed on through Mr Nerd's 278-page presentation. "This stuff's about as interesting as an abo's armpit."

Perhaps he could skip a bit? Quickly riffling on through the speech, his eyes alighted on a section headed "Longer life for all in the new Millennium – particularly the rich."

He paused momentarily and noticed that Mr Stothard had jumped to his feet and was shouting "*encore*", "*bravo*" and other words foreign to Rupert's ears.

"Siddown, you plonker," he barked. "I haven't finished yet. There's a good bit here about how people like me are going to live much longer than ever before. Thanks to advances in medical technology, I'm going to be around for one hell of a long time yet."

There was a frenzied burst of applause from the assembled denizens of academe, led by Lord Rees-Mogg, as they sat below the oil paintings of their illustrious forbears.

Rupert felt as if even these grave greybeards of former times were nodding in approval – the likes of Professor Wilbraham Prendergast, the celebrated 19th century translator of Euclid, and Sir Isaiah Smallprint, whose classic monograph on the sex life of earthworms had never been surpassed.

"Yep, with any luck, I'll be here to see in the *next* millennium!"

There were roars of delighted laughter at this off-the-cuff joke, scripted by the Times's own in-house professional humourist Mr Coren.

BUT one person was not laughing. A black frown had creased the exquisite bone-china features of the great man's third wife, the delectable Wendy.

"What had upset her?" wondered the commander of the world's greatest media empire. "These Chinese sheilas – talk about inscrutable."

He ploughed on with a recital of statistics about heart replacement surgery for the over- 80s, genetic restructuring for the over-90s and Viagra implants for tomorrow's centenarians.

But Wendy made such impatient winding-up symbols with her perfectly manicured index finger, that her obedient spouse quickly ended his lecture with a perfunctory "My name's Rupert Murdoch. Good night."

Amid a rapturous standing ovation, led by Sir David Yelland and his friend Mr Hall from the News of the World, Rupert stepped down from the podium into the arms of his young oriental wife and quietly murmured in her delicate willow-pattern ear, "Blimey, Wend, I nearly bored myself to death there."

"Really, darling?" she replied, her eyes brightening visibly, and her frown melting away like snow on Mount Feng Shui as the sun appears ver the Mao Tze River.

"I thought it was marvellous. I'm going to arrange for you to deliver it in every major university in the world as soon as possible."

The ancient clock in Tom Quad at Stuttaford College struck 100 times, as its crudely carved mediaeval skeleton figures revolved around the clock face to remind mankind of its mortality...

© *The Sylvie Krin Departure Lounge Library 1999.*

Literary Review

YULE LOG RUNNING

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

CHRISTMAS is, traditionally, the season of nausea. Just look at the pavements. Alternatively, consult the Books of the Year choices that have filled the literary pages for the last few weeks. There it all is spread out before you, expertly regurgitated for your pleasure.

This has been a rich year for books of the year choices. After a brief period of self-restraint, our literary advisers have really let themselves go and poured it all out. One of the reasons the books of the year have been quite so pongy this year is the volume of multiple entries. No fewer than 57 reviewers chose their books of the year more than once. Fifty-seven. Probably more. We may have missed a few dozen through fatigue.

Moreover, many of these multiple-entry artists made their choice three, four or even five times. We have their names but we can't be bothered to write them all out. A few examples, though? Ben Pimlott chose his books of the year in the *New Statesman*, the *Guardian*, the *Indie*, the *Observer* and the *Daily Telegraph*. And so on and on and on. Some hard workers chose different books for each publication; dutiful donkeys trotted out the same election.

That's why reading the books of the year makes you feel so dizzy and nauseous. That unsettling feeling you get that you've read them already is not wrong. You have. Last year. Last week. Yesterday. Elsewhere today. Tomorrow again, if you keep at it.

So off the pundits go, backslapping and arselicking as hard as they can. In two or three weekends, they turn the whole pretence of judicious, considered, objective reviewing that has been kept up on the books pages for the previous 12 months into a pile of rubbish.

This reduction of opinion into a kind of fuming tip is what the Books of the Year choices are all about. Yet a few individual asininities still poke out of the heap.

There was Sir Peregrine Worsthorne choosing everybody's book of the year, *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetze in his own inimitable fashion: "If Black Africans have not yet produced a great masterpiece of their own, they have been the inspiration of two great masterpieces..." — the other being *Heart of Darkness*.

There was Carmen Callil, tragically choosing Michael Holroyd's memoir of his childhood: "There are episodes in Michael Holroyd's *Basil Street Blues* which made me laugh and occasions when I burst into tears..." — thinking perhaps of the £625,000 she was besotted enough to give him for his unreadable biography of George Bloody Shaw when she was in charge of Chatto and still hoping.

In the *Mail* Deborah Moggach raved about Posy Simmonds's Gemma Bovery: "The most original book of the year... Posy not only draws like a dream, she writes like one, too." It has since emerged that Deborah helped her friend Posy get the sex scenes right by being photographed in flagrante, to provide a model for Gemma's excesses.

Then, as ever, there were any number of sweet reciprocities. D.J. Taylor chose John Walsh in the *Spectator*; John Walsh chose D.J. Taylor in the *Independent* on the very same day. In the same paper, Ahdaf Soueif chose Edward Said's memoir *Out of Place* as her book of the year ("moved me enormously"). In the *TLS* for 3 December, Edward Said, after mature consideration, chose *Map of Love* by Ahdaf Soueif: "For its insightful, transcultural plotting of time and desire, its refined delineation of intimacy and impasse, it justly deserved its Booker nomination (and the withheld prize itself!)", Said said. Oriental courtesy, perhaps.

Alas, not all smoochings worked out so neatly. Colin Thubron and Nicholas Shakespeare have alternated as chairman and treasurer of the Thubron-Shakespeare Mutual Appreciation Society for years now. This year, Thubron was among the half dozen reviewers who chose Shakespeare's Bruce Chatwin biography all right. But, oh dear, in the *Telegraph* Shakespeare unaccountably remarked that his "favourite travel book" was Claudio Magris's *Microcosms*. Everybody else's was *In Siberia* by Colin Thubron. There'll be ructions at the AGM.

Perhaps this year's most quickly pretentious appearance was by Terry Eagleton in the *New Statesman* recommending *The Ticklish Subject* by the exotic Lacanian Slavoj Zizek. "Zizek — Slovenian politico, psychoanalytic theorist, obsessional Hitchcock fan and intellectual jester – mixes together a heady brew of Kant, Hegel, Freud, Heidegger, cinema and everyday anecdotes," he said as a come-on. Let's not forget Tariq Ali's brave effort in choosing no fewer than 10 strenuous titles in the *Independent*, though.

Much more poignant was the tragic ineptitude displayed by one Jon Snow in the *Guardian*, who had either not managed to understand the question or had just blundered on despite not having read a single book published this year. He chose three old ones: *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* ("read and loved"), *Snow Falling on Cedars* ("another sumptuous read") and *Charlotte Gray* by Sebastian Faulks ("greatly enjoyed"). It would be hard to come up with three more perfect triangulation points for middlebrow banality.

Many reviewers oddly thought log-rolling was somehow made all right by announcing that that was what they were doing. "I also — thank goodness — enjoyed books by journalistic colleagues and friends, including John Walsh's memoir *The Falling Angels*, Alexander Chancellor's stylish *Some Times in America*, Henry Porter's debut thriller *Judgement Day*, and Gibert Adair's novel *A Closed Book*," said Sebastian Faulks, literature's cackhanded answer to Betty Kenward.

This was certainly the year of the most shameless family solidarity ever. Alexander Waugh's book about *Time* was mentioned by only two critics. One was his aunt, Harriet Waugh, and the other his dad, Bron.

In the *Spectator* the nepotism, snobbery and fecklessness have reached new densities. Surely a tiny bit of editing every now and then wouldn't spoil its unique flavour? Alastair Forbes chose Anthony Beevor, Beevor's wife Artemis Cooper and then "Artemis's grandfather, my much-missed friend Duff Cooper" who's had his *Talleyrand* reissued. Taki chose novels by his friends, "the Buckleys, father and son". Jonathan Cecil chose some snaps of the Thames by, frankly, his brother-in-law.

Yet crowning even these efforts was Helen Osborne who, in the *Sunday Telegraph*, chose as her book of the century no less, the autobiography of her late husband John Osborne, "recently reprinted... an unbeatable snip at £14.99 (Faber)". She, presumably, collects the royalties.

The opportunity to choose a book of the century or of the millennium brought out a number of corkers. Melvyn Bragg still believes in the gospel of sex. His book of the century is *Women in Love*. Don't turn your back on him, girls.

Pricelessly, Douglas Hurd named *The Forsyte Saga*. And at the *Independent*, they keep a reviewer called Emma Hagestadt who believes the book of the century is *Foreign Affairs* by Alison Lurie. It would be interesting to know what else, if anything, she has read (no, not really).

Counting on your fingers, tying knots in our handkerchiefs, the most popular novel was *Disgrace* with more than 20 votes. Michael Frayn's *Headlong* got about 16, *Being Dead* by Jim Crace about 13. Among the biographies, the winner was *Karl Marx* by Francis Wheen with 13 or so, followed by *Salisbury* by Andrew Roberts with a dozen. *Chatwin* brought up the rear, as you might expect, although John Major won a surprising number of fans, even if many of them, such as Ann Widdecombe and Norman St John Stevas, are not people you'd want behind you under any circumstances.

JUST FANCY THAT!

HARPICCOLLINS' much-hyped, seldom-visited Fire and Water website appears to be tackling this Christmas without the automatic gift selector service it offered last year.

This is no great loss, however, as the whole thing was rigged, something the site's then boss Mark Bishop cheerfully admits now that he has left the publisher to go into interactive TV. "No matter what you typed in," he told a recent book trade seminar, "it always suggested *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt."

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
OUT NOW
SIR CLIFF RICHARD'S
MILLENNIUM PRAYER
IT'S FITTING THAT WE HAVE A NUMBER ONE THAT REFLECTS THE TRUE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS....
- DELIA SMITH!
THE NEW BESTSELLER
DELIA'S HOW TO COOK BOOK TWO
DELIA
MMM.... FOOD GUZZLE SLURP SCOFF BINGE!

Goodbye to the 90s

TWO notable events took place this month — one widely reported, the other a bit less so — which might be thought to have a kind of symbolic resonance for the book trade.

One was the death, at the ripe age of 92, of Sir Rupert Hart-Davis. The other was the purchase of the distinguished American novelist Jane Smiley's new manuscript by the fine old independent firm of Faber and Faber.

No one with the faintest interest in English Lit. could fail to be impressed by the career of Sir Rupert, editor (notably of the *Letters of Oscar Wilde* — a dazzling amateur achievement in a world which even then was being taken over by whey-faced American scholars), correspondent (six volumes of *The Lyttelton/Hart-Davis Letters*), all-round literary bloke, who on top of this occupied 20 years in charge of his own imprint shoving out books of the highest quality on the simple principle that such things were good and that — necessarily — someone ought to publish them.

More than one memorialist talked about a "golden age of publishing", and yet — a sad truth that rose above nearly every obituary notice — Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd spent its two decades or so treading an ever slippier financial tightrope, accompanied by perpetual bailings out and buyings up. Good books, of the kind Sir Rupert published, don't make money.

If there was a lesson that publishers were supposed to have learned in the early 90s it was that the old improvident days were gone. Yes, let us publish good books; but no, let us not do it to the detriment of our ability to publish any sort of book at all. What happened to Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson of Hamish Hamilton, a publisher distinguished by a discriminating enthusiasm for literature and a settled habit of flinging huge sums of money at stuff he liked? Answer: he was relieved of his duties and the imprint he eventually contributed to Random House after the latter's takeover of Reed has ceased to exist. All of which, in a roundabout way, brings us back to Faber and its decision to shell out something over £200,000 for Ms Smiley's new one.

For some years now Ms Smiley — a writer of the highest class, it should hastily be said, regularly awarded prizes and filmed — has been published on this side of the Atlantic by HarperCollins. Looking at the most recent set of accounts when some bright-eyed American agent winged in the current offering, HarperCollins realised that the last one had failed to earn out its two hundred grand advance by a factor of something like nine out of ten. Not before time it was decided that this couldn't go on, with the result that Ms Smiley departed to Faber for more or less the same amount as she got before. Of which transaction it may confidently be stated that, however much the Queen Square sales force is galvanised into action, the effect will be the same as Matthew Evans, Fabers' gnarled chairman, ordering up £150,000 worth of ten pounds notes from the bank and setting fire to them.

A real learning experience, eh, the 1990s? Even now, with most of literary London bossed out of New York and Germany, there are still people anxious to fling huge amounts of money at dodgy properties in the hope that some of it will stick. Why indulge in the kind of turkeycocking (© A.S. Byatt) that, at least indirectly, sent many a fine old English independent into the hands of the foreigner? And yet in many ways the game was already lost. The 1990s may have been the decade in which the UK publishing industry stopped being the UK publishing industry, but it was also the decade in which book publishers generally lost the greater part of their power. Most of the money now made in the industry accumulates at the farther ends of the equation — by writers, agents and distributors — not by the publisher. He just sits in the middle and gets bullied.

The 1990s was the decade in which nearly all the worst trends of the 1980s got worse. One of the worst of the worst trends that got worse — to borrow a riff from that all-too imitable stylist Martin Amis — was the inability of Englit's big names to cut it any more. Salman. Mart himself. Julian. Jeanette...

Meanwhile, the middlebrow bestseller got more middlebrow, and the real money was made by cookery books and novelty acts. And yet, not everything in the literary garden is blighted rubbish. Curiously enough literary culture is flourishing in this country. Increasingly, though, it does so beyond the standard literary circuit, kept alive by enthusiastic small-timers. In the 1990s publishing got fatter and more international, but it also — a consequence of this enlargement — got smaller and more fragmented. Significantly it was also the decade of niche publishers — Harvill (joyfully, if precariously, detached from HarperCollins) Serpent's Tail, Arcadia and all the others. Meanwhile a handful of major independents — Bloomsbury, Fourth Estate and Faber — manage to combine the extremely difficult trick of balancing serious stuff with the opportunist garbage necessary to keep the serious stuff afloat.

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THE appearance of Craig Raine's ultra-donnish new literary magazine *Areté* in the shops looks set to fan the flames of an age-old literary controversy.

In among the contributions from obliging chums such as Ian McEwan and William Boyd are no fewer than five unpublished letters from T.S. Eliot to distinguished correspondents such as Virginia Woolf and Ezra ("Rabbit") Pound. Permission to reproduce these was acquired by Raine, using his long-term Faber connections, from Eliot's widow, Valerie. All of which begs a question begged many times before and always waved away in the brusquest terms — what has happened to the projected edition of Eliot's letters?

Valerie, the youthful widow, became her late husband's literary executor, was also appointed a director of his publisher, Faber & Faber, and set to work on the collected edition of his letters. Since that time exactly one volume of this work has appeared.

Simultaneously the Eliot estate has exerted a stranglehold over Eliot studies: Peter Ackroyd in his 1984 biography, for example, was denied permission to quote from unpublished correspondence. Complaints were met with stiff letters to newspapers from Faber's chairman, Matthew Evans, to the effect that Mrs Eliot should be left alone to get on with her multi-volume act of *pietas*. Which is, a decade and a half later... where exactly?

■ **ACCORDING to the trade press, Tim Waterstone has turned into Dan Dare and made a bid for the company he founded 17 years ago, apparently motivated by unhappiness with the way David "Mekon" Kneale and Alan "Weasel" Giles (*Eyes passim*) have treated staff and with their enthusiastic "dumbing down" of the once-highbrow chain.**

Sadly, the latter may now be too ingrained in the upper reaches of head office for him to do anything about it. A high-ranking Waterstone's executive — almost certainly not the Mekon who, for all his faults, is said to be genuinely well-read — was heard recently complaining about one of the choices for the company's Book of the Month promotion.

"Why have they chosen an author I've never heard of?" the bibliophile wondered. Which writer, then, inspired this outburst? A near-unknown parvenu called, er, John Updike.

■ WHEN the author and composer Paul Bowles died last month in his adopted Tangiers at the age of 88, his *Daily Telegraph* obituary commented that the old Bohemian had spent his later years living "in some poverty in [a] shabby apartment block". Could it be that his financially precarious state was not helped by the parsimony of his UK publisher Peter Owen?

Drinking in the French House in Soho when he heard the news, an eyewitness says Owen's first reaction was to "dash to the telephone at the end of the bar, call the office and get them to stop Bowles's royalty cheques".

"This is typical of Peter," says a writer friend of Owen's who once turned down one of his derisory advances. "A World Service interviewer once asked if he was really the meanest publisher in London, to which he replied that authors only wasted their money on drink, drugs and women." In the case of Bowles — who "wavered between homosexuality and asexuality", according to the *Torygraph* — Owen seems to have been wrong on at least one of the three counts.

■ THE venerable Oxford University Press evidently developed a taste for blood when axing its poetry list: it has now taken to running smear campaigns against eminent authors.

Next spring, OUP publishes the Oxford History of Western Art, edited by Professor Martin Kemp of Oxford University. As part of the sales campaign, OUP marketing wallahs have drawn up detailed tables comparing their tome with those of rival publishing houses.

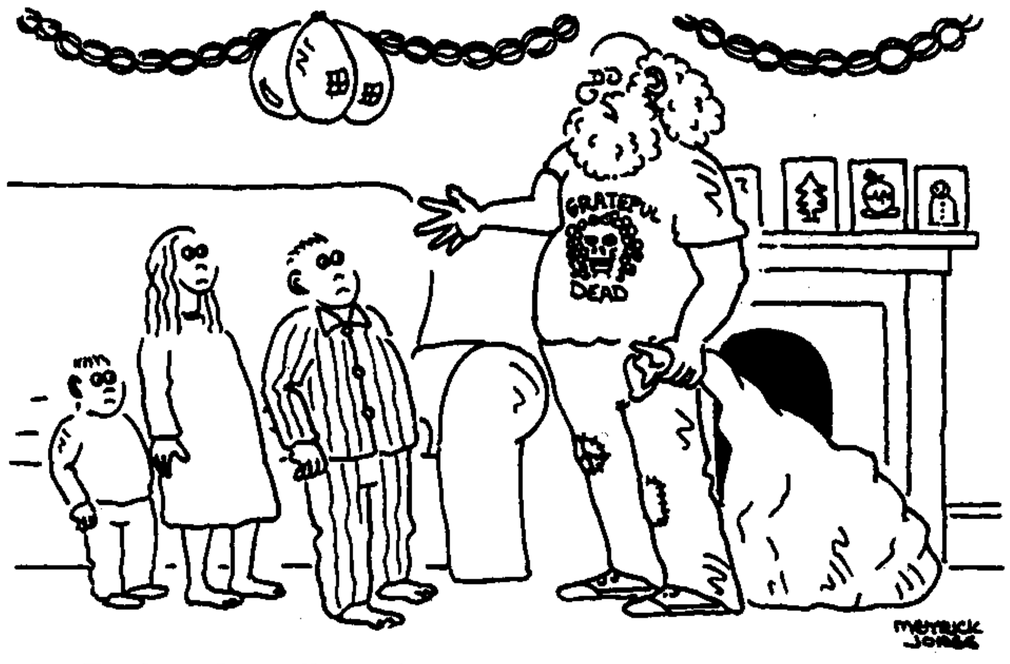
Ernst Gombrich's The Story of Art — despite being one of the most admired introductions to western art ever published — is described as "solid slabs of text unrelieved of any navigational devises" (sic).

H. W. Janson's History of Art (market leader in the US) is dismissed as "a worm's eye view" — an especially tasteless description, since Janson is indeed now dead.

Hugh Honour and John Fleming are accused of not even being the authors of their acclaimed A World History of Art, which was awarded the Mitchell prize for art history. OUP states — without offering a shred of evidence — that Honour and Fleming merely "finished off" a text by John Calmann (who commissioned the book).

The reputations of Honour and Fleming are further called into question because they have no affiliation with a university. The dimwits who now run OUP are apparently unaware that the same could be said of most great art historians and critics down the ages, from Vasari through Ruskin to David Sylvester.

'Bookworm'



"On Fridays I'm allowed to wear my own clothes to work."

THE TEN FACES OF JEFFREY ARCHER

(AS REVEALED IN PRIVATE EYE *OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS)*

1) FIDDLER

WILLIAM HAGUE is not the first Tory party bigwig to have been told the awful truth about Jeffrey Archer... and to have ignored it.

The first known occasion this happened was recorded in *Private Eye* almost exactly 30 years ago, when the Tory party chairman Anthony Barber was approached by the former Tory MP for Lancaster, Humphrey Berkeley. When Berkeley heard that Archer had been adopted as Tory candidate for a by-election in the safe seat of Louth, he was furious. Two matters worried him.

First was the proven fiddling of expenses by Archer at the United Nations Association (UNA) where Berkeley was chairman and Archer a "fundraiser". Archer made a habit of lunching at other people's expense at glamorous places such as the Savoy, and charging the meals to the UNA. In three months in 1968 he stuffed himself with huge lunches at the Savoy and the Carlton House and charged the bills to the UNA. The problem was that both bills had been paid by the UNA's treasurer, Lord Luke. An inquiry was set up into Archer's expense claims by the association's deputy treasurer, Harold Jowitt. As a result of Jowitt's findings Archer agreed to pay back £82, which he agreed had been falsely claimed as expenses.

2) FORGER

ANOTHER matter which annoyed Berkeley, and which he reported to party chairman Barber, was the fraudulent use of Berkeley's name as a founding director of a fundraising outfit called Arrow Enterprises. Archer simply forged Berkeley's signature on the company documents.

Anthony Barber (then a Tory MP, later a Lord) checked out these allegations by what has now become known as the William Hague method. Archer was asked if they were true, and he denied them. The chairman of the Louth Tory association, Jack Vincent, was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as saying that the allegations were "without substance".

Humphrey Berkeley was astonished that such prominent Tories should dismiss so lightly the clearest possible proof that Archer was a fiddler and a forger. When I suggested to Berkeley during an interview for the *Eye* that Archer was not perhaps the best person to be a member of parliament, Berkeley bellowed: "Parliament? He ought to be in a remand home."

3) BULLY

PARLIAMENT, however, was where the forger and fixer went. In January 1970 the *Eye* mourned for Archer's fellow Tory members of the Greater London Council, whose expenses up to that time, the *Eye* disclosed, were being handled by Archer — in exchange for 10 percent of the proceeds.

When this story was put to Archer a quarter of a century later by the author Michael Crick, Archer denied it utterly and threatened, if he were even asked about it once more, to put the matter in the hands of his solicitors. It was only when Crick produced affidavits from several former Tory GLC councillors confirming that they had indeed had their expense forms dealt with by Archer that all recourse to solicitors was abandoned and Crick could publish the story.

4) LIAR

ARCHER'S career as Tory MP lasted until 1974, when he was forced to resign after becoming involved in the Aquablast fraud. Archer again pretended he had acted honourably.

Eye 332 (Sept 1974) quoted him telling the *Daily Mail*: "I am not an extravagant liver. I'd rather be in my constituency helping old age pensioners than on a yacht in the South of France." He had taken, he said, the "honourable course" of resigning as soon as he knew of the fraud which ditched his firm.

In fact, as the *Eye* revealed he had been to the police several months previously and warned them of the impending fraud. He then tried to brazen out the resulting scandal. The only reason he failed was his own greed. Certain that he could become a millionaire, and buy a yacht in the South of France on the back of worthless Aquablast shares, he borrowed nearly £200,000 from a Tory publisher, who naturally demanded his money back.

Archer might have been able to explain to his gullible constituency officers that he was a silly dupe of the mafia in the Aquablast story — but he could not shake off an angry creditor so easily.

5) SHOPLIFTER

OUT of parliament and broke, he flew to Canada in 1975 to give evidence against the men who had defrauded him. Worried about his slightly scruffy appearance, he swiped three suits from Simpsons store in downtown Toronto without paying for them. He was held by store detectives, handed over to the police and only released when they confirmed that he was a prosecution witness in the fraud trial.

This unsavoury incident was known for years to several British newspapers. All were deflected by Archer from publishing the story by the time-honoured device of lying. "I was not involved in this incident," Archer wrote to me in his own handwriting in 1987. Eleven years later, he admitted in the *Evening Standard* that he had been involved in the incident, but was not prepared to admit it "to a Left-wing journalist with a campaign against me".

6) FANTASIST

ARCHER spent the years from the fraud trial in 1974 writing awful political pot-boilers and making the fortune of which he had always dreamed.

A decade of relentless sucking up to Margaret Thatcher and her circle brought him the deputy chairmanship of the Tory party, from which high office he promptly advised the unemployed to "get up off your backsides". By April 1986 the *Eye* could report that Thatcher had relegated her dashing deputy chairman to "harmless functions such as school prize-givings" and had succeeded for a time in muzzling him. But at the end of one tour, in Cornwall, he could not resist telling a gaggle of admiring journalists and young Tories of a terrorist attempt to assassinate him during the tour.

As evidence Archer cited the discovery of an explosive device on the road his car was due to pass on, the switching of his car to an unmarked police car, sniffer dogs used in his hotel to hunt for explosives, and the deployment of 40 police officers at Archer's meeting in Totnes. The *Eye* (635, 18 April 1986) reported that at least one sceptical hack submitted Archer's story to the unusual process of checking.

"The check revealed:

- There had been no device anywhere on Mr Archer's route, nor rumour of any such device, nor the slightest suggestion of one.
- The cars were switched because Archer was late.
- There were no sniffer dogs used in any of the hotels used by Mr Archer anywhere on his tour.
- The number of policemen employed at the Totnes meeting was not 40 but four.

The Eye's comment was blunt. "Archer fantasises about himself all the time, and increasingly does so in public".

7) PLAGIARIST

NOR did all those school prize-givings turn out to be as "harmless" as Thatcher hoped. In 1983, Archer judged a short story competition run by a local magazine in Cambridge. He unhesitatingly awarded first prize to Kathleen Burnett, who had submitted a story about the ostensible thoughts of a woman, who turns out to be a cat.

He publicly dubbed the story "in the tradition of Somerset Maugham" (one of whose stories Jeffrey Archer had already plagiarised). Early in 1989, Mrs Burnett happened to read Jeffrey Archer's latest collection of short stories, *A Twist in The Tale*, which included a tale with a twist, namely the ostensible thoughts of a woman who turned out to be a cat. She wrote angrily to Archer and his publisher, but was reminded by Lord Mishcon, Archer's lawyer, that there was no law against stealing an idea. Moreover, Archer implied that she had agreed to the plagiarism — whereas in fact he had only offered to publish her story under her name.

8) PERJURER

EVEN before Mrs Burnett discovered the plagiarism, Archer had been forced out of office once again. His decision to send an aide to pay off a prostitute who claimed that Archer had picked her up in Shepherds Market and bought sex from her was plastered all over the front of the *News of the World*.

Archer resigned as Tory deputy chairman and sued the *Daily Star* for libel. Somehow he managed to convince a jury a) that he had never met the prostitute (though two journalists remembered him saying he had); b) that he had never had sex with her (though she identified him as a client, and another client, a solicitor, had seen him hiring her; c) that he had agreed to pay her thousands of pounds because he felt sorry for her; and d) that he was a faithful husband with a faithful wife (though his affair with Andrina Colquhoun had been widely publicised in the gossip columns). Despite numerous articles in the *Eye* pouring scorn on these fantasies, it was 12 years before they were even partially exposed.

9) LUCKY HUSBAND

THE real winner of the case was Archer's wife Mary, who was held up by the judge as the perfect English wife whose husband was so lucky to have her that he could not possibly have been unfaithful.

Dr Mary Archer is a scientist in her own right, and her business career is often as intriguing as that of her husband. In 1994, the *Eye* was sent a parcel of documents about a firm called Blackford Holdings, registered in Panama, together with the allegation that Blackford Holdings poured Kuwaiti money into the Tory Party.

Prodigious efforts failed to uncover a single fact about the dealings of Blackford Holdings, except that for a long time it was the biggest client of a small merchant bank called Robert Fraser. In 1987, the year of her husband's successful libel action, Dr Mary Archer became "scientific consultant" to Robert Fraser. The chairman of the bank was Lord (Geoffrey) Rippon, a former Tory cabinet minister and founder-shareholder of the disastrous Archer Galley, opened by Jeffrey Archer in the 1960s.

Another director of Robert Fraser, Colin Empson, was Jeffrey Archer's personal money manager. Robert Fraser refused to comment to the *Eye* about any business done by or on behalf of Blackford Holdings, except to confirm that at the end of 1992 Fraser's decided to "discontinue" its banking services and that Mary Archer's consultancy was "discontinued"" at the same time. 1992 was the year when prime minister John Major, another of Archer's warmest friends and admirers, recommended Archer for a peerage. He got it, only after some opposition from the scrutiny committee.

10) INSIDER-DEALER

THE "discontinuing" of Dr Mary Archer's consultancy at Blackford Holdings was in no sense the end of her business career. Almost at once, as a mark of her deep experience of the media and her residence in Cambridgeshire, she became a director of the local television company Anglia.

In December 1993 and January 1994, the take-over of Anglia by Lord Hollick's burgeoning media empire, MAI, became the subject of much gossip among a widening group of people in the City.

Among these were Karen Morgan Thomas, a Tory party worker, and friend of Jeffrey Archer, who spoke to him several times on the telephone in December 1993, and also made herself £22,000 dealing in Anglia shares after the MAI bid.

Archer himself splashed out a quarter of a million quid on Anglia shares, netting a neat profit of £76,000. Archer did not use his usual brokers, nor did Broosk Saib, his Kurdish friend who received the profit. Each stage in the Anglia share saga engaged the attention of the *Eye*'s City correspondent, Slicker, who predicted long before it happened that the department of trade investigation into Archer's Anglia dealings would come to no conclusion; and that this would be celebrated by Archer as a clear conclusion that he had been cleared.

Over several issues of the *Eye* in 1995 and 1996, Slicker posed questions to Archer, his wife and his *lucky Kurdish* chum that have never been answered.

In issue 902, he produced startling evidence, naming names, of "one or more of the City's long-standing insider dealing rings at work" over the MAI bid for Anglia. Archer's nose for information about interesting movements on the Stock Exchange was on parade in one of those revealing *Eye* items on 4 November 1994, the year the Archer deal was revealed. The story was about a lunch in a London restaurant "back in the 1980s" to which Archer invited Anthony Hilton, city editor of the *Evening Standard*.

"Tell me, Mr Hilton, the great novelist said, are you a rich man?" Hilton confessed that he was not. "But," Archer continued, "in your job you must come across a lot of price-sensitive information?" Hilton confirmed that he did indeed often hear rumours of impending take-overs and such like. Jeffrey then made a simple proposal. If he provided the money and Hilton provided the tip-offs, they could make a killing on the stock market and split the proceeds. What could be more agreeable?

"Alas, the unenterprising Hilton did not take up Jeffrey's brilliant idea."

THE TWO FACES OF THE PRESS

THE collapse of Lord Archer's bid to be mayor of London has led to a spate of hostile stories about him in the newspapers which previously protected him. The *Sunday Times* found space for a story about Archer and the painting he bought from the BCCI receivers which first appeared, in all its detail, in the *Eye* in July 1997.

The *Observer* of 5 December printed the reminiscences of Kitty Kelley about Archer's anti-Semitic outburst at a London lunch for top women — the story was published in full in *Eye* 844 (22 April 1994).

The *Mail* newspapers, always Archer's most fervent admirers, have discovered that Michael Stacpoole, the flunky who paid off the prostitute at Victoria Station, now claims that he was lying and was paid tens of thousands not to give evidence at the libel trial. These worries of Mr Stacpoole appeared in the *Eye* in November 1988.

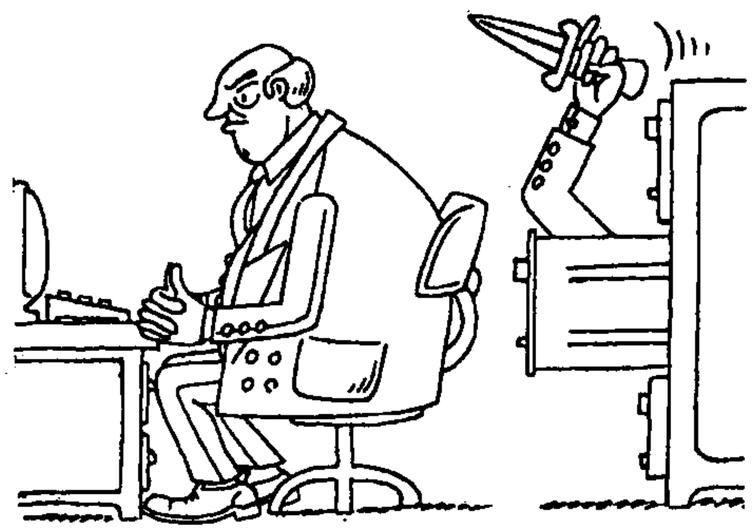
The *Mail*'s Geoffrey Levy, who never published a word against any rich or famous person when they were in fashion, now denounces Archer for lying at the libel trial. Even Stewart Steven, who supported Archer through the thin and the thick of the libel trial, now declares that "everyone knew about Archer".

All these stories and allegations were printed in *Private Eye* long ago — and studiously ignored by the great and good who, now that the allegations they spurned are proved beyond reasonable doubt, throw up their hands in horror, moaning: "Nobody ever told us."

Paul Foot

Footnote: Paul Foot, somewhat recovered from his operation on a ruptured artery last April, which kept him in hospital for six months, returns to the Eye for the next issue. He will be contributing to the back pages and can be contacted at the Eye by letter, phone (0171-287 3183) or email strobes @private-eye.co.uk.

IN THE BACK



CORPORATE WELFARE

Take the money and run...

LABOUR's crackdown on welfare scroungers does not of course extend to the recipients of "corporate welfare". The government continues to dish out benefits galore in the form of regional selective assistance grants (see *Eye* 990), and seems oddly unconcerned even if the handouts fail to prevent redundancies.

In April 1998, for instance, Albright & Wilson — which previously employed the services of Dr Jack Cunningham — were offered £668,000 to "protect" employment in Whitehaven. The grant was supposed to save 170 jobs for the firm which makes the phosphates that put the fizz into Coke and Pepsi. But in October 1998 Albright's chief executive Paul Rocheleau announced that his firm was "very aggressively" moving production to Latin America and Asia; and in July 1999, 240 redundancies were declared at Whitehaven.

There is a mechanism to stop companies who take the money and run: grants are usually doled out over several years, and stopped if jobs aren't protected. However, the department of trade and industry (DTI) is generous with the rules. As far as the DTI is concerned, the 170 jobs "saved" were in one part of the plant, while the 240 jobs lost come from a different and entirely unrelated bit of the Whitehaven complex.

Another beneficiary of this creative accounting is the American drug giant IVAX, whose deputy chief executive Isaac Kaye donated £100,000 to the Labour party this year. In October 1998, DTI minister Barbara Roche proudly informed parliament of a £990,000 benefit cheque for drug firm Norton Healthcare, IVAX's British subsidiary, for "inward investment in the manufacturing sector". The grant was intended to help Norton move its head office from Harlow to London's Docklands, in theory "protecting" 381 full-time jobs and five part-time jobs, as well as creating 50 new posts.

One week before Roche disclosed the payment, IVAX announced that it was leaving the UK "manufacturing sector" altogether by moving all production and packaging to its plant in Waterford, Ireland. This involved 250 job cuts in its English operation, on top of another 250 jobs that had been slashed in 1997-8.

IVAX shed a few crocodile tears, with chief executive Phillip Frost claiming to "recognise the discomfort this restructuring will bring to affected employees and communities". He added that although its plants in the south-east would be closed, their few remaining functions would be "consolidated in a newly constructed facility located in London's royal docks".

Roche was apparently untroubled. As far as the DTI is concerned, the grant was given to help shift the HQ and "save" 386 jobs. The fact that 500 other jobs were cut as the firm transformed itself from a Harlow-based manufacturer to a white-collar operation in Docklands, with the aid of £990,000 of taxpayers' money, is neither here nor there.

BENEFITS AGENCY

New Labour, NewCompassion

HOW disabled or disadvantaged does a person have to be to convince the Benefits Agency and its private medical advisers that he or she qualifies for special allowances?

Very, to judge by the shocking case of Mrs Brenda Hobart.

Mrs Hobart's health started to deteriorate seriously last spring. A diabetic, she was constantly vomiting, suffering stomach pains and kidney infections. In and out of hospital for a series of tests, it was not until June that she was finally diagnosed with lymphatic cancer and given a short time to live. Mrs Hobart also suffered from schizophrenia, although that condition was well managed by drugs.

At the time she was living in a council flat in Ruislip on a small pension and her death sentence triggered worries about not being able to meet her bills and pay for the increasing care she would need as her health deteriorated further. An independent woman, she wanted to be able to sort out her affairs without burdening her two children.

Her social worker referred Mrs Hobart to her local Citizen's Advice Bureau, which helped her make a claim to the Benefits Agency. As someone who was dying, she should have automatically qualified under special rules for a higher level disability living allowance (DLA) until her death.

But the agency decided that not only did she not satisfy the "special rules criteria", she did not qualify for DLA at all. It seems Mrs Hobart's doctor's report was either never received by the agency or went missing. Instead Sema Group Medical Services — privatised doctors employed by the Benefits Agency — recorded after a cursory call to Mrs Hobart's GP that although she was still receiving chemotherapy, there was some doubt about whether the case was one of "terminal illness". Based on that assessment a Benefits Agency adjudicator decided special rules did not apply.

A month later Mrs Hobart's case came up for full assessment and there can have been no doubt. There was a report from her GP stating: "Mrs Hobart suffers a variety of medical conditions from which she is undergoing intensive therapy. She is under extreme stress because of this and has to make more effort and care with her psychiatric condition. Her physical conditions can make her too ill to look after herself and can make her prone to infections needing hospital admissions". Her main problems were lymphatic carcinoma, diabetes, hypertension and schizophrenia. A second opinion from a Sema doctor confirmed she was "very sick with the lymphoma — which has spread to her lung and back". Still no benefit.

"It caused my mother great distress. It made her feel guilty that she had sought help," said her daughter, Shannon. It was only after persistent appeals by the CAB and protests from Mrs Hobart's MP, John Wilkinson, that Sema Group Medical Services and the Benefits Agency decided that Mrs Hobart was dying after all and that she was entitled to benefits of more than £100 a week.

In a tacit admission the agency had got it dreadfully wrong, it now agreed to backdate payment to the date of her original application. But by this time Mrs Hobart was in hospital. She died four days later.

ASBESTOSIS CLAIM

Cape of bad faith

THIS WEEK 3,000 South Africans who are sick and dying after asbestos exposure in British-owned and run mines will take their fight for compensation to the House of Lords.

So far Cape plc, the British multinational which ignored health warnings and employed children in its filthy asbestos mines and factories, has managed to block their claims for damages through the British courts. Last month the company persuaded the court

continued page 44

of appeal that because there were so many claimants, public policy dictated that the case should be heard in South Africa — even though the company no longer has any assets or interests there.

It is perhaps worth reminding their lordships then that in 1990 when Cape was faced with similar claims in the United States from hundreds of American workers suffering cancers and asbestosis, the company managed to successfully argue exactly the *opposite*.

To avoid paying compensation to its US victims, Cape closed down its American operations, hived its marketing arrangements off to a Liechtenstein company — and simply declined to answer the case maintaining that it was an English company with no assets or interests in the Texas jurisdiction. When the Texas court judgment went against Cape by default, the UK courts refused to enforce payment of $15.65m to the injured workers.

With no presence in the South African jurisdiction, Cape is now desperate to have the case heard there because it knows the workers have only a dog's hope of success. There is no legal aid for personal injury cases there and the chances of getting legal and expert representation equal to that of a big multi-national are precisely zilch.

In fact so determined is Cape that at one stage — when it thought it was going to lose the battle — in order to defeat the suggestion that the South Africans could not afford legal representation in their own country, it offered to fund the claimants itself! Never mind the obvious conflict of interest, according to Professor David Unterhalter, of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, lawyers representing Cape indicated that the company was thinking of putting up 2.5m South African rand. It wondered if the centre would coordinate the litigation in the South African courts.

So here in Britain if their lordships decline the South African workers' petition for appeal, the only former employees who Cape may yet have to answer to through the courts are those who were employed at one of the company's factories in Turin. Cape spent lots of legal time and money trying to defeat the Italians' claim by going shopping for their ideal court as well. But they were defeated by article two of the Brussels Convention, which says that a defendant company should be sued in its home country — exactly what the South Africans say.

So that is as clear as mud. It is okay for one lot of foreigners to make a British company answer for its wrongdoing in the UK courts, but not for another — especially if they are poor and black.

NATIONAL PARKS

Quarrying favour

DESPITE their designation as ancient monuments and sites of "outstanding natural beauty", Britain's national parks do not enjoy automatic protection — even from quarrying, it seems.

The Stancliffe Stone Company Limited, a quarry merchant, wants to remove huge chunks (2.39m tonnes to be precise) of lucrative and beautiful gritstone from Stanton Moor in the Peak District — a neolithic and bronze age playground of barrows and standing stones, including the Nine Ladies stone circle.

All that stands between the company and two gaping wounds on the historic moors are some dedicated tree huggers and burrowers (facing a cold Christmas), a small but outraged local community and an uncertain and untested piece of 1995 legislation which is being enforced by the National Parks Authority.

Winston Churchill's rebuild-Britain government of the early 1950s handed out many quarrying permits which are still valid today. Recognising that environmental concerns and priorities have changed, more enlightened quarrying companies have voluntarily surrendered their 50-year-old licences to operate in national parks.

Not so Stancliffe, which wants to enforce its rights to extract stone from two long-dormant quarries at Endcliff and Lees. The firm is desperate to get its hands on the highly sought after buff-coloured stone — used, for example, to build the new parliament building in Westminster. Wastage is high. For every tonne of stone hewed from the park, at least half will be rejected.

The only piece of law that can stop the company is the ambiguous 1995 environment act, under which the company must be able to satisfy current environmental demands before it can proceed. With the threat to the historic landscape, the flora — in particular a rare moss; the fauna — badgers, fallow deer and bats; and the impact of heavy plant and lorries, it is hard to see how reopening of the dormant quarries could ever meet today's environmental concerns.

Last month the National Park Authority looked set break new ground by blocking the quarrying under the act. But then its planning committee deferred a decision to allow for further consultation with the quarry company. Which is all very worrying for the locals and the tree-huggers.

Said one called Lee via a mobile as he prepared for a long sit in his tree house on the moor: "The trouble is they've never managed to stop the quarrying before."

Stancliffe, not unsurprisingly, was delighted by the reprieve. Its quarry director Ian Holmes said in a statement: "We are keen to work with both the Peak Park and the local community to achieve a solution that is best for all parties concerned." Only three weeks earlier the community had watched in horror as Stancliffe staff, escorted by police, bulldozed their way on to one of the sites, apparently uprooting and chopping down protected trees in order to carry out a hydrological survey.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Parole bored

ONE MAN who will have nothing to celebrate this weekend is David Blagden (*Eye* 980) who is set to spend his 22nd Christmas behind bars. His crime? Setting fire to a pair of church curtains and a pew.

No one was injured. He put the fire out himself and he waited for the police. Everyone accepts it was a cry for help after the sudden death of both his parents. But Blagden has become one of the country's longest-serving inmates. Terrorists, murderers and multiple rapists have all fared better from the justice system.

Blagden was given a discretionary life sentence, with a later recommendation that he serve seven years. He has now done three times that. On Wednesday 23 December, Blagden was due for a parole hearing. After appeals to Tony Blair, Jack Straw and Brenda herself, Blagden was hopeful he would finally be released. That was until his lawyer Kevin O'Gorman learned that there was a recommendation before the parole board that Blagden serve a further six months in an open prison to better prepare him for release.

This is astonishing given that Blagden has repeatedly spent periods in open prisons to prepare him for release. And he still isn't out. On one occasion, in desperation he walked out of the open prison and found himself a job and a flat. What better way to prove he could cope outside? But that only led to his being sent back behind bars in a normal jail.

Blagden has spent the last six months in Bullingdon prison and Lindholme open prison — and that apparently hasn't prepared him for release either. Probably because it is being wound down in preparation for its conversion into an immigration detention centre. In fact the psychologist's report before the parole board suggests that neither jail is suitable for preparing long-serving life prisoners for release. It recommends he be sent to Sudbury open prison where he can get the necessary training and help. Which begs the question: why didn't he get that "training" years ago?

"It is scandalous," said Mr O'Gorman. "Every time they add on another six months, it adds to the grave injustice this man has suffered. When he went in he was a young man needing help and support — instead they threw away the key."

FISH FARMING

Tartan barmy

THE famous "Tartan Quality" label that adorns thousands of farm salmon products sold in UK supermarkets may be less than "kosher".

Approval to use the label is given by Food Certification (Scotland) Ltd (FCS), a company with close links to... fish farmers. FCS is limited by guarantee. The sole guarantor as at December 1996 was the Scottish Salmon Growers' Association (SSGA), the industry representative body recently reformed as Scottish Quality Salmon (SQS).

Angus Morgan, chairman of the FCS governing board, claims: "In selecting a certified product, consumers will be purchasing a top quality article backed by an independently controlled, comprehensive quality assurance programme." Mr Morgan was a director of SSGA and is a director of Scottish Quality Salmon. He is also chairman of Ardvar Salmon, fish farmers in north-west Sutherland.

FCS director John Laing served on the board of SSGA and is a director of Scottish Quality Salmon and a fish farmer. The third FCS director, William Mark McDavid, is marketing director of Scotland's largest fish farmers, Marine Harvest McConnell, an appointment previously held by Angus Morgan.

FCS executive director Chris Absolon, responsible for "day to day control", lives in Wiltshire. FCS is recognised as a certification body by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service. FCS is also recognised by United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS), which is a division of the ministry of fisheries, agriculture and rood (MAFF). Chris Absolon is a previous secretary of UKROFS.

At present the Orkney Salmon Company, a small family business in the Orkney Islands, produces the only organic salmon approved by the UK Soil Association. Mainstream fish farmers are keen to market their own brand of organic salmon, but the Soil Association is concerned by their use of chemicals to rear fish, including the neurotoxic insecticide, ivermectin, when prescribed by a vet.

Food Certification (Scotland) Ltd has been more amenable. Scottish Quality Salmon — headed by Lord Jamie Lindsay, former SSGA chief and ex-Tory government Scottish environment minister — is alleged to have had discussions with FCS. As a result, FCS may approve the use of the word "organic" to describe some products SQS members sell.

The Orkney Salmon Company will suffer and the term "organic" could be devalued. Nevertheless, backed by Food Certification (Scotland) Ltd, consumers will no doubt accept organic claims made by major fish farmers — the Dutch, Norwegian and other foreign business interests who own almost 80 percent of Scotland's salmon farms.

Remarkable for a company certifying a Scottish product, FCS does not have a Scottish office. Its registered address is c/o Mackenzie Kerr, Inverness accountants, where FCS "Tartan Quality" manuals and "organic standard" manuals may be examined, but not copied.

These manuals describe procedures carried out by FCS inspectors to ensure fish farmers and processors meet, and continue to meet, FCS certification standards. Inspections are made twice, four, six or eight times a year, depending upon the type of business visited. But apart from two inspectors, FCS does not appear to have any full-time employees, anywhere. FCS is listed in neither the Highlands & Islands telephone directory nor in Yellow Pages.

Are English-based quangos endorsing claims of "Tartan Quality" and "organic standards" made by a Scottish organisation wholly funded by fish farmers who benefit from these designations?

In the City

IT IS MORE than a year since the Sultan of Brunei, the second richest man in the world, went to his $30bn cupboard and was shocked to find it bare. Well almost. There was still some $6bn and change. But it's all relative. And in this case the problem was a relative, his far too free spending brother Prince Jefri, Brunei's answer to Gordon Brown.

Since the sultan discovered the $24bn hole in summer 1998, teams of lawyers, accountants and private investigators have been crawling through the wreckage of Jefri's Amedeo Development empire and the books of the Brunei Investment Agency (BIA) which had control of the tiny, feudal, oil-rich state's cheque book.

They have discovered that up to $6bn of BIA funds from the $24bn had been exported, officially to purchase overseas assets, and then lost, disappeared, siphoned into private investments or generally misappropriated. The balance had been invested in Brunei by Jefri or lost when the Asian markets crashed in 1997.

Armed with this information lawyers for the sultan (Freshfields) and his brother (Lovell White Durrant) have been engaged in endless negotiations for a settlement which would see Brunei recover either cash or assets under threat of legal action. The two brothers are said to have only met once since the dispute blew up. Jefri spends most of his time — probably wisely — outside Brunei.

But despite encouragement from the British government, the long term protector of Brunei's ruling family, and constant predictions that a deal was imminent, a second Ramadan has arrived without either a deal or a writ.

Insiders say the sticking point is that Jefri wants absolute immunity from any legal action over the losses at the BIA while he was in charge. Without that he will not provide full disclosure of what happened to the BIA billions or hand over all assets under the control of himself and, more importantly, his associates around the world. It is thought he has been encouraged to press for the immunity deal to cover his little team of helpers into whose names and companies poured much of the Brunei billions. Jefri is also said to want to keep enough to ensure the continuation of his profligate polo-and-prostitutes lifestyle.

The sultan and his advisers have so far refused to give blanket immunity or budge from wanting everything back. So Jefri has denied any wrongdoing and refused to hand over any assets outside Brunei. The question once Ramadan ends next month is whether the sultan is prepared to drop the legal bomb and expose his brother, who in turn may damage him thereby destabilising the already delicate political position in Brunei. Jefri claims many of the grotesquely expensive projects there — the empty 600-room hotel, luxury hospital and Disneyland lookalike — were approved by the sultan, plus much more.

Any court case would provide an arsenal of ammunition for Islamic fundamentalists who, Jefri suggests, are influencing his elder brother Mohamed. The f-word is why HMG wants a deal. British companies, led by Shell, also have a big stake in Brunei.

But so far the sultan has shown no stomach for a public legal war with his brother. It may be the way of the western world — which is why the lawyers have been stuck in legalistic demands and the dialogue of bookends — but it is not the way of Brunei or the similar Gulf states. Litigation between family members rarely started is soon settled. Everyone has too much to lose. Jefri's problems stemmed from his ill-judged London civil action against the brothers Manoukian, whose revelations about their role in providing for his excesses resulted in a sudden and secret settlement.

While the sultan ponders his next move — war or peace on Jefri's terms — the dismantling of the Amedeo empire in Brunei (debts $1bn) continues and the BIA pursues a policy of selling those assets it can recover. The BIA is said to have been behind the sales of Jefri's £400m art collection and several of his 30 British properties plus others in the US.

Unclear as yet is that fate of Jefri's armada headed by the ocean going yacht *Tits* and matching speedboats *Nipples I* and *Nipples II* not to mention the biggest yacht ever ordered — almost $500m or $1m a metre — which waits unfinished after $215m was spent in a German shipyard. Then there is the private air force. Nine Gulfstream G-5s at $40m a pop, plus $9m each for extras such as gold and lapiz interiors, were ordered for Jefri and the royal family. Not to mention the thousands of Rolls Royce Bentley Javas, Mercedes 600s, Ferraris, McLarens and Aston Martins. But who was the client —Jefri, the sultan, the BIA, some other Brunei state entity? And who is now the owner?

So far — because of the lack of a deal — there has been no real recovery of assets outside Brunei. These continue to be controlled through offshore companies and trusts by key Jefri associates such as former plasterer Danny Wong, who ran Amedeo. Investigators have traced Wong properties in London. They are also interested in the role of his American brother-in-law Michael Selby, as well as other link men in New York, the Philippines, France and New Zealand.

This circle is believed to control assets, especially properties and hotels, acquired on behalf of Jefri or the BIA. Millions are suspected to have been siphoned off by gross overcharging on the refurbishment of Jefri-owned hotels. The Jefri associates no doubt claim this was all done with his full knowledge and approval.

The problem for the pursuers is that very little is in Jefri's own name or that of what are obviously his companies, never mind the BIA. So far Jefri has refused to instruct the front men to cooperate. Without Jefri's cooperation, the legal owners of record of these assets can simply say they are the real owners and/or the lucky beneficiaries of Jefri's legendary generosity.

Investigators have also looked closely at the role of Citibank which handled much of the BIA billions. There is evidence of huge cash withdrawals — six figure sums. Much of this was flown out of Brunei especially in suitcases and boxes. At one stage Jefri — known to the bank as "PJ" or "VIP" — and his companies are said to have run up a $700m overdraft. Questions have been raised about whether BIA and Jefri accounts were mixed and offset leaving the BIA on the short-end but Citibank in funds.

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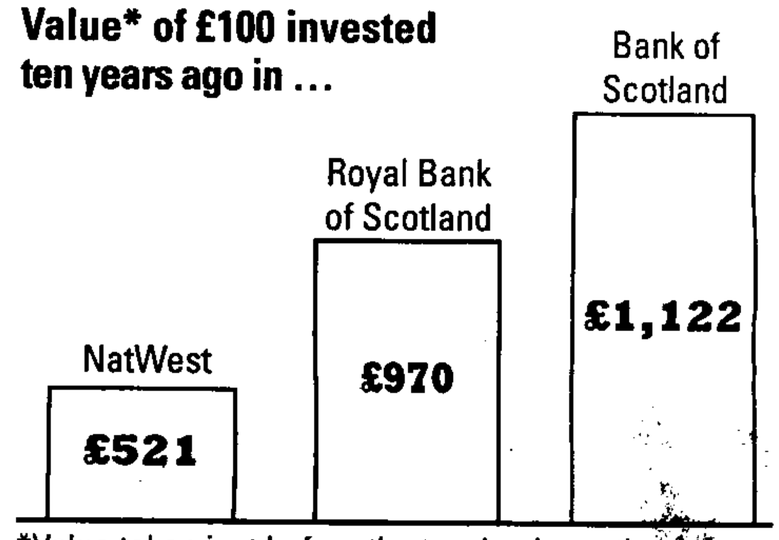

*Value taken just before the two banks on the right targeted the bank on the left.

Citibank in Brunei and New York, the two main centres involved, claim they were acting on proper authority from Jefri and his private secretary who ran the BIA and is also now abroad. The issue is where did state funds end and personal funds begin? In Brunei, like the Gulf states, the line, if there is one, is at best fuzzy.

Exactly what exposure Citibank could have in Brunei is unclear but possibly substantial. Any suggestions of legal action — sums of several billion dollars have been mentioned — have met stern resistance from the US bankers who acknowledge no wrongdoing or liability. But if Jefri gets sued, Citibank may not be far behind. In which case it is said to have threatened to bankrupt Jefri. That course may yet be followed by Amedeo's creditors.

Then there are Jefri's City advisers — white shoe lawyers Allen & Overy and accountants KPMG who helped set up much of his opaque offshore network of companies and trusts for tax and legal reasons. Their fees are said to have run into several millions a year. KPMG — paid it is said close to $5m a year — says it did not spot any wrong-doing about the billions disappearing abroad because it relied on letters of representation from BIA officials that all transfers were approved and not theft. Shades of that other fine Muslim financial giant, the Bank of Conmen & Cocaine International. But once again it would be hard to prove wrongdoing when the advisers can point to the instructions of their client. And without Jefri onboard, the sultan and the BIA may have little or no case.

Most if not all investigations into the $10bn Brunei black hole effectively ended months ago. It is now up to the sultan to either press the button or walk away. Those with knowledge of the negotiations believe ultimately there will be a deal under which everything will be covered up leaving Jefri and his associates with the comfortable lifestyle they have been used to and no further terminal publicity. For with the oil price heading to new highs, all at once Brunei's cupboard is filling up again. It may even soon be time to spend, spend, spend. Ahoy Nipples! Full speed ahead Tits!

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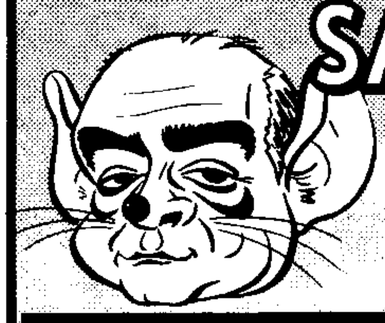

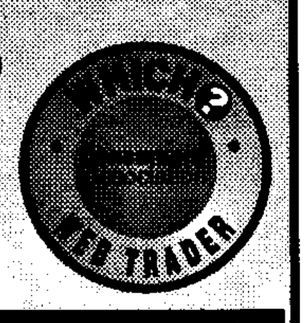

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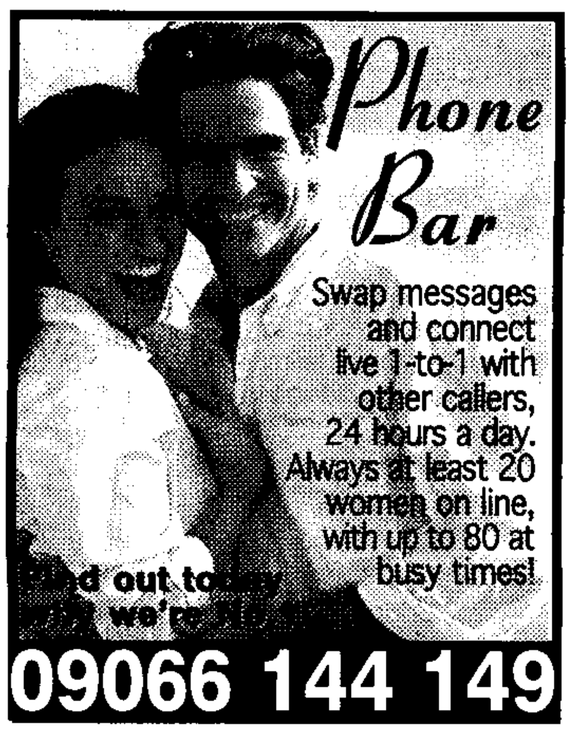
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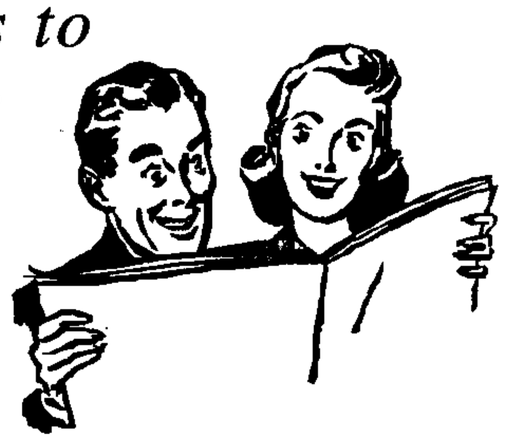

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VICTOR LEWIS SMITH, TV review Evening Standard.

EYE SAY

SPEECHWRITING by Mitch Murray – see page 31

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